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Two Tales

ARE ALL MEN ALIKE

THE LOST TITIAN

Arthur Stringer

Fiction, Canadian

TWIN TALES

NCW

Twin Tales

ARE ALL MEN ALIKE

and

THE LOST TITIAN

By ARTHUR STRINGER

AUTHOR OF

"The Prairie Wife," "The Prairie Mother," "The Man Who Couldn't Sleep," "The Wine of Life," "The Door of Dread," etc.

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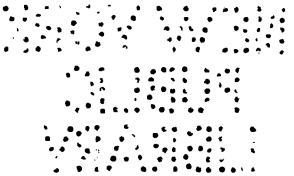

TWIN TALES

TWIN TALES

Are All Men Alike

CHAPTER ONE

Her name was Theodora, which means, of course, "the gift of God," as her sad-eyed Uncle Chandler was in the habit of reminding her. In full, it was Theodora Lydia Lorillard Hayden. But she was usually called Teddie.

She was the kind of girl you couldn't quite keep from calling Teddie, if you chanced to know her. And even though her frustrated male parent had counted on her being a boy, and even though there were times when Teddie herself wished that she had been a boy, and even though her own Aunt Tryphena—who still rever-

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entially referred to Ward McAllister and still sedulously locked up the manor gates at Piping Rock when that modern atrocity yclept the Horse Show was on—solemnly averred that no nice girl ever had a boy's name attached to her without just cause, Teddie, you must remember, was not masculine. God bless her adorable little body, she was anything but that! She was merely a poor little rich girl who'd longed all her life for freedom and had only succeeded in bruising, if not exactly her wings, at least the anterior of a very slender tibia, on the bars of a very big and impressive cage.

What she really suffered from, even as a child, was the etiolating restraints of the over-millioned. She panted for an elbow-room which apparently could never be hers. And as she fought for breathing-space between the musty tapestries of deportment she was called intractable and incorrigible, when the only thing that was wrong with her was the subliminal call of the wild in her cloistered little bosom, the call that should have been respected by turning her

loose in a summer-camp or giving her a few weeks in the Adirondacks, where she might have straightened out the tangled-up Robinson Crusoe complexes that made her a menace and a trial to constituted authority.

But constituted authority didn't understand Teddie. It even went so far, in time, as to wash its hands of her. For those passionate but abortive attempts at liberation had begun very early in Teddie's career.

At the tender age of seven, after incarceration for sprinkling the West Drive with roofing-nails on the occasion of a *fête champêtre* from which she had been excluded on the ground of youth, she had amputated her hair and purchased appropriate attire from her maturer neighbor and playmate, Gerald Rhindelander West, intent on running away to the Far West and becoming a cowboy.

But Major Chandler Kane, an uncle who stoutly maintained that obstreperous youth should not be faced as a virtue or a vice but as a fact, happened to be coming out

for the week-end at about the same time, and intercepted Teddie at the railway station. So, after discreetly depriving her of the gardener's knife and the brass-mounted Moorish pistol from the library mantel, with the assistance of three chocolate *mousses* and an incredibly complicated and sirup-drenched and maraschino-stippled and pineapple-flavored nut sundae not inappropriately designated on the menu-card as "The Hatchet-Burier," he succeeded in wheedling out of her the secret of her disguise, telephoned for the car, and brought her home with a slight bilious attack and a momentarily tempered spirit.

A year later, after condign punishment for having tied sunbonnets on the heads of the Florentine marble lions in the Sunken Garden, she revolted against the tyranny of French verbs and the chinless Mademoiselle Desjarlais by escaping from the study window to the leads of the conservatory, from which she climbed to the top of the chauffeurs' domicile above the garage, where she calmly mounted a chimney and ate salted pecans and refused to

come down. It began to rain, later on, but this didn't matter. What really mattered was the arrival of Ladder-Truck Number Three of the Tuxedo Fire Department. That was a great hour in the life of our over-ennuied Teddie, who, in fact, formed so substantial a friendship with those helmeted heroes that she was thereafter permitted to slide down the polished brass pole which led from the sleeping-quarters to the ground floor of the Fire Hall. So active was her interest in their burnished apparatus, and so dominating grew her hunger to hear the great red motors roar and see the Ladder-Truck wheels strike fire as they took the car-rails at the Avenue-crossing, that she turned in a quite unnecessary alarm. The resultant spectacle she regarded as almost as satisfying as the Chariot Race in *Ben-Hur*. For this offense, however, she was first severely reprimanded and later confined to the Lilac Room, where she locked herself in the old nursery bathroom and proceeded to flood the marble basin therein, reveling in the primitive joy of running water until the

servants' stairs became like unto a second Falls of Montmorency, and Wilson, the second footman, had to wriggle in over the transom to shut off the taps and save the house from inundation.

On the heels of this she was reported as having bitten the dentist's fingers when he unexpectedly touched a nerve. She further embarrassed the family and the tranquillity of Tuxedo Park by prying open an express crate and liberating two Russian wolf-hounds awaiting delivery on one end of the neat little depot platform. She claimed, it is true, that the dogs had stood there for a whole day, and wanted to get out, and were starving to death—but that was not a potent factor when it came to final adjustment of damages.

She hated the thought of captivity, of course, just as she hated inertia, for two years earlier she had appropriated a niblick for the purpose of demolishing a new French doll, protesting, after the demolition, that she would be satisfied with nothing if she couldn't carry about something "with real livings in it." Her preoccupied

parents, after the manner of their kind, maintained that she had a blind spot in her moral nature and talked vaguely but hopefully of what school would do to her when the time came.

She was, in fact, emerging into her tumultuous teens before she could be persuaded that waxed parquetry was not made for the purpose of sliding on and that a tea-wagon was not the correct thing to cascade down the terrace on. And when the golden key of the printed word might have opened a newer and wider world to her she was allotted a series of exceedingly namby-pamby "uplift" books (kindly suggested by the Bishop one day after he'd had a glance over the Ketley orchids in the greenhouse). These, however, she quietly consigned to the garage water-tank, and having entered into secret negotiations with Muggsie, the head chauffeur's stepson, she bartered a wrist-watch with a broken hair-spring, a silver-studded dog-collar, and two Tournament racquets for a dog-eared copy of *The Hidden Hand* and a much-thumbed copy of *The Toilers of the*

Sea with the last seven chapters missing. Then, urged on by that undecipherable ache for freedom, she padded a crotch in the upper regions of the biggest copper-beech on the East Drive, padded it with two plump sofa-pillows, and there ensconcing herself, let her spirit expand in direct ratio to the accruing cramp in her spindly young legs. But copper-beeches are not over-comfortable places to read in, and Teddie developed a settled limp which prompted her mother to shake her head and reiterate a conviction that the child should be looked over by an orthopedic specialist.

With Teddie the movies were still strictly taboo, but having secretly visited the Hippodrome with her Uncle Chandler, she became the victim of a brief but burning passion to go on the stage, preferably in tank-work, whereby she might startle the world through the grace of her aquatic feats. When she proceeded to perfect herself in this calling, however, by practising diving in the deeper end of the Lily Pond,

she was given castor-oil and sent to bed to obviate a perhaps fatal cold which gave no slightest signs of putting in an appearance.

Her spirit was scotched, but not killed, for when, duly chaperoned, she was permitted to visit the Garden and see Barnum & Bailey's in all its glory, she decided to run away with the circus and wear spangled tights and do trapeze-work under the Big Top. She even escaped from official guardianship long enough to offer a burly elephant-feeder two thoroughbred Shetland ponies and what was left of her spending-money for the privilege of being smuggled away in one of the band-wagons. The burly feeder took pains to explain that their next move was into winter quarters at Providence, but gravely assured the rapt-eyed girl that he'd fix the thing up for her, once they went out under canvas again in the spring. So for months poor deluded Teddie secretly and sedulously practised chinning the bar and skin-the-cat and the muscle-grind, together with divers other aerial contortions, only to

learn, when the crocuses bloomed again, that elephant-feeders weren't persons one could always depend upon.

About this time the era of indigestion and temperament came along, the era when Teddie began to betray an abnormal interest in what might repose on the *buffet*, and queen-olives fought with chocolate éclairs, and pickled walnuts combined with *biscuit Tortoni* to dispute the ventral supremacy of broiled mushrooms. It was the era when capon-wings and melon mangoes were apt to be found wrapped up in embroidered towels with insets of Venetian lace, and tucked in under the edges of the oppressively big colonial mahogany bed with the pineapple posts, and bonbon-boxes obtruded from the corners of a much becushioned *bergère*, and salted almonds mysteriously transferred themselves from below-stairs to the lacquered jewel-box in a lilac-tinted boudoir. This occurred about the time that her mother so zealously took up the study of genealogy and had an entirely new crest made for the family stationery and even neglected her club work

and her charity organizations to trace out the little-known intermarriages in the house of the Romanoffs. And it was about the same time that her dreamy-eyed father, who had been born to more millions than he cared to count, "gave up dining out to count electrons," as Uncle Chandler expressed it. For Teddie's father was an amateur mathematician and scientist who had made two highly important discoveries in light-deflection, highly important in only an abstract and theoretical way, as he was at pains to point out, since like the Einstein Theory they could never by any manner or means affect any object or any person on this terrestrial globe. It was sufficient, however, to convert him into what Uncle Chandler denominated as "an eclipse-hound," which meant that he and his complicated photographic paraphernalia went dreamily and repeatedly off to Arizona or upper Brazil or Egypt or the Island of Principe.

And this brought about the divorce in the Hayden family, the old Major sturdily maintained, not an out-and-out Supreme

Court one, but an astral one, with a twelve-inch telescope as a co-respondent. However that might have been, it left Trumbull Hayden a very faint and ghostly figure to his daughter Theodora Lydia Lorillard, who had her own natural and inherited love for solitude, but could never be alone, just as she could never be free. For always, when she moved about, she did so with a maid or a governess or a groom at her heels. And to add to her misery and her despair of final emancipation, the régime of the governess and the tutor and the dancing-master crept stealthily upon her. It was her second tutor, an Oxford importation with a hot-potato accent and a pale but penetrating eye, whom Teddie adroitly tied up in one of the big library *fauteuils* and refused to liberate until he had duly recounted the entire story of The Pit and the Pendulum, with The Fall of the House of Usher put in for good measure. And two days later, during tea on the terrace, she put smelling-salts in his cup, the same being not only punishment for an unfavorable conduct-report, but a

timely intimation that tittle-tattlers would have short shrift with her.

Then came other tutors and teachers and governesses, each determined in character and each departing in time with a secret consolation check from Uncle Chandler and and the conviction that Miss Theodora was anything but the gift of God. And then came boarding-school, boarding-school from which so much was surreptitiously expected. But from this first boarding-school, which had castellated eaves and overlooked the Hudson, Teddie was brought back by her Uncle Chandler in disgrace and a peacock-blue landaulet. A year later the attempt was renewed, it is true, this time in a Quaker establishment with a Welsh name and an imitation Norman arch over its main entrance. But this school, besides being ultra-fashionable in name was also ultra-frugal in all matters of *menu,* and Teddie proved so successful in playing cutthroat poker for "desserts" that seventeen extraneous sweets in one week did not and could not escape the attention of the quiet-eyed

maiden-ladies in attendance. So this, added to the gumming up of one of the grand-pianos in the practise-room with five pounds of prohibited chocolate-creams, led to an interview with the lady-principal herself. And even that interview might not have been a valedictory one had Teddie not been detected perusing a copy of Daudet's *Jack* during an ancient-history "period," a Daudet's *Jack* from which was unearthed an excellent caricature of the lady-principal herself. So Teddie awoke still again to the discovery that her dream of personal freedom was merely an *ignis fatuus*, and she journeyed homeward, a melancholy loss to the basket-ball team and an even more melancholy accession to the paternal acres at Tuxedo.

Nor was the spirit of the home circle very greatly brightened when Teddie attended her first holiday party in the white and gold ballroom of the St. Regis, where she danced very badly with very dignified young partners in Eton jackets. There she not only stumbled on to the bewildering consciousness that there was something

vaguely but ineradicably different in boys and girls, but publicly punched one of the older youths in the eye for holding her in a manner which she regarded as objectionable. And later in the same evening, when the still older brother of the thumped one sought to make family amends by the seeming honesty of his apologies, and Teddie relentingly agreed to let bygones be bygones, and they shook hands over it, man to man, as it were, and while Teddie stood studying a hawthorn rose-jar on one of the tulip-wood consoles, that same persistent youth, seeking to translate a moment of impersonal softening into a movement of personal appropriation, cheerfully and clumsily tried to kiss her. Whereupon, let it be duly noted, Theodora Lydia first enunciated her significant, her perplexed, and her slightly exasperated query: "Are all boys like that?"

Yet by the time the governess-cart had been stowed away and Teddie had learned there was little use being a millionaire's daughter, after all, since the third pound of Maillards never did taste as sweet as

the first, her butternut brown showed a tendency to fade into magnolia-pink with a background of gardenia-white, and certain earlier boy-like straightnesses of line took unto themselves mysterious contours, and the runway of freckles that spanned the bridge of her adorable little nose faded like a Milky Way in the morning sky.

And that meant still another era, the era of solemnly visited shops in the City, and muffled and many-mirrored *salons* where she was pinned up and snipped at and pressed down, and sleepy afternoon concerts that smelled of violets and warm furs and over-breathed air, and a carefully selected matinée or two, and even revived lessons in dancing, which, oddly enough, the resilient-spirited Teddie never greatly took to. And then came equally sedate and carefully timed migrations to Lakewood and Aiken and Florida, though Teddie openly acknowledged her dislike to traveling with a retinue and seventeen pieces of baggage, to say nothing of the genealogical books and the case of certified milk.

But there were quite a number of inex-

plicable wrinkles in Teddie's mental make-up. Although to the manner born, she entertained a fixed indifference toward animals and a disturbingly *bourgeois* admiration for machinery. Horses bit at you as you passed them, and dogs were rather smelly, and Guernsey cows put their heads down and tried to horn you if you went near them in scarlet sports-clothes. But a machine was a machine, and did only and always what it was ordained to do. If you took the trouble to understand it and treat it right, it remained your meek and faithful servant. Restoring the viscera of disembowled traveling-clocks, in fact, gave Teddie many repeated lessons in patience, and one of her pleasantest rainy-day occupations was to dissect and then reassemble one of her father's larger and more expensive lucernal microscopes.

And this tends to explain why Teddie, even before her toes could quite reach the pedals, was able to run the Haydens' big royal-blue limousine. On one glorious occasion, indeed, and quite unknown to her deluded family, she *chauffed* in secret all

the morning of Election Day, *chauffed* for the Democratic party, with strange banners encircling that dignified vehicle and even stranger figures reposing therein, to say nothing of a tin box of champagne-wafers and a brocaded carton of candied fruit on the driving-seat beside her.

But her Uncle Chandler, who was a staunch Republican, beheld that alliance with the treacherous enemy and rescued the royal-blue limousine from ignominy while Teddie was regaling herself on three ice-cream sodas in a corner drug store. Being less expert at such things than he imagined, however, Uncle Chandler steered the big car into a box-pillar, and broke the lamps, and dolorously entered into a compact with his niece to the end that the doings of the day in question might remain a sealed book to the rest of the family. For Uncle Chandler resolutely maintained, when Teddie was not in hearing, that the girl was a brick and a bit of a wonder, and that he hoped to heaven life wouldn't tame her down to a chow-chow in permanent-wave and petticoats.

"The fact is," he was in the habit of saying to Lydia Hayden, "I can't possibly conceive how two every-day old oysters like you and Trummie ever came into possession of a high-stepper like Theodora" —though, mercifully, he never imparted this bit of information to Teddie herself. For Teddie was quite hard enough to live with, even as things were. She rather hated the town house on the Avenue, which she openly called a mausoleum and agreed with her absent father that the one redeeming feature about brownstone fronts was the fact that the brownstone itself could never survive more than a century. She was, as her mother sorrowfully and repeatedly acknowledged, without a sense of the past, for she mocked at that town house's crystal chandeliers and its white marble mantels and the faded splendor of its antique gold-and-ivory furniture, which looked as though it had come out of the Ark and made you think of Queen Victoria with a backache. When the spreading tides of commerce crept to and even encircled their staid party-walls and a velour-draped

art-emporium opened up beside them, Teddie protested that she wasn't greatly taken with the idea of living next to a paint shop. For it was about this time that she first threatened to become a trained nurse or a Deaconess if she had to have balsam-salts in her bath and a maid to chaperon the faucet-flow and poke her feet into rabbit-skin bags. She still hungered for freedom, and complained to her Uncle Chandler about "having to punch a time-clock," as she put it, and more than once had been found enlarging on the Edwardian nature of her environment.

"Poor mother, you know, hasn't a thought later than 1899," this apostle of the New had quite pensively averred.

"There were some very respectable thoughts in 1899, as I remember them," her Uncle Chandler had promptly responded, vaguely aware of little black clouds on the sky-line.

"Yes, that's what's the matter with them," acknowledged Teddie. "They were too respectable. They were smug. And I despise smugness."

The wrinkled-eyed old dandy contemplated her with a ruminative and abstracted stare.

"You're right, Teddikins," he finally agreed. "We all get smug as we get older. That's what that chap—er—that chap called Wordsworth tried to tell us once. Life, my dear, is a waffle-iron that shuts down on us and squeezes us into nice little squares like all the other waffles in the world. It will come and take even the immortal You-ness out of you. It tames you, Teddie, and trims you down, and turns you out an altogether acceptable but an altogether commonplace member of society. It converts you from a gooey savage into a genteel and straight-edged type. So if you can't quite jibe with the mater, don't take it all too tragically. There'll be a time when Little Teddie Number Two will feel exactly the same about you, and——"

"You'll never see me idiotic enough to get married," interrupted Teddie.

"Well, there's lots of time to think about that. But in the meantime, my dear, don't break the Fifth Commandment, even

though you have to bend it a little. And on the way out I'm going to remind Lydia about that roadster I've been telling her you ought to have. It's wonderful what a lot of steam you can let off in a roadster of your own!"

Teddie, in time, came into possession of her roadster, a small wine-colored racer upholstered in dove-gray and neatly disguised as a shopping-car. And it seemed, during the first few weeks of its ownership, that the wings of personal freedom had finally been bestowed upon the recalcitrant Teddie, who went hillward in her roadster with claret and caviar sandwiches packed under its seat and went cityward with fat and disorderly little rolls of bank-notes tucked under its cushion-ends. She loved that car, for a fortnight at least, with a devotion that was wonderful to behold, and talked to it fraternally as her narrow-toed brogan spurred it into slipping past dust-trailing joy-riders on the back roads, and wept openly when it blew a tire and buckled a radius-rod in the ditch, patting its side

sympathetically and saying soothing little words to it as though it were an animal.

But time, alas, proved to Teddie that her *Château en Espagne* was not to be reached on rubber tires. For a car, after all, is only a merry-go-round with an elastic orbit, a humdrum old merry-go-round that isn't so merry as it seems, since it must always cover the same old roads and the same old rounds and remain hampered and held in by the same old urban and suburban regulations. Teddie, it is true, soon found herself on nodding terms with the Park "canaries" and the traffic cops, and was able to weed out the ones who'd give her the wink when she forgot about the one-way streets and the parking signs and the speed-laws in general. Yet three times in one season she shocked Tuxedo Park by appearing in court and being twice fined for road violations and once publicly lectured for imperiling the peace and safety of the commonwealth.

So even with the machinery which she loved she began to see that she was still

restricted and hampered and circumscribed and imprisoned. And the poor little rich girl who should have been quite happy, remained quite normally and satisfactorily and luxuriously miserable.

CHAPTER TWO

THE Friday Junior Cotillions for the "Not-Outs," in those older days when the Banquet-Room at Sherry's was still a beehive of youth and beauty, had no particular appeal to a girl who preferred spanners and monkey-wrenches to dance-favors. And even the charity-façaded carnivals of the Junior League, which couldn't be open to her before she "had gone down the skids" (as Teddie flippantly phrased her long-discussed *début*), stood without that glamour which consecrated them to the humbler-born social climber. For the Tuxedo and Meadow Brook colonies, Teddie had always mistily understood, were the salt of the earth and the elect of the Social Register. Many a time, indeed, with amused and indifferent eyes she had witnessed the gentle art of freezing-out exercised at even so romping a thing as

the Toboggan Slide, and many a time, warm in her own security, she had beheld the tennis and squash courts translated into frigidities which left Dante's Seventh Inferno sultry in comparison. Yet she heard diatribes on the new-rich with a rather disdainful indifference, for not a few of these Want-to-Be's seems much handsomer to the eye than most of the Have-Beens, to say nothing of being brighter and brisker. Teddie, in fact, nursed a secret disdain for the hereditary millionaire, since it was the dullness of the brood, she maintained, which was embittering her blighted young life. For Teddie still chafed against the bars of her gilded cage and nursed the pardonably human illusion that the thing you can't quite get is the thing you must have.

Now, most girls of Teddie's set and inclination escape from their adolescent boredom by excursion into amorous adventure. But Teddie felt that she had exhausted love very early in life. For at the tender age of nine she had fallen in love with the Park policeman who'd so easily

gathered her up in his arm after a fall on the Bridle Path just under the Seventy-Second Street bridge, where the deep shadow of the arch gave too abrupt a change from sunlight to gloom and caused her horse to swerve, buck, and then bolt riderless as far as the Sheep-fold. But it was Officer McGlinchy who picked up Teddie, with what he described as "a foine bump on the bean," little dreaming that through his purely official and impersonal ministrations he was bruising Teddie's heart almost as badly as the Bridle Path had bruised her head. Teddie's passion remained a secret one, it is true, but the promised vision of the statuesque Patrick McGlinchy gave a new interest to her morning canter along the Bridle Path and a richer coloring to the sward and rocks of Central Park. It was not until she was on the eve of forlornly engineering still another fall in the neighborhood of that over-taciturn officer that Teddie learned McGlinchy was sedately married and the father of seven little McGlinchys down in the Ninth Ward.

Then she fell in love with Biquet, the second chauffeur, who had been a flying-man and had a slashing wound of honor across his well-tanned young cheek-bone. But her feeling for Biquet proved an odd confusion of issues, for she found that she liked him only when he permitted her to assist in eviscerating one of the car-engines or let her help overhaul and assemble the landaulet's differential, with her ready little paws covered with oil and axle-grease and her white corduroy frock as black as a sweep's. But she realized, on witnessing Biquet kissing the pantry-maid, one night when blockade-running for certain residuary oyster *pâtés*, that it was not really Biquet she loved, but the machinery over which he presided.

There was a time, too, during this period of potential romantic alliances, when she might possibly have entertained some tenderer feeling for Gerry Rhindelander West, her next-door neighbor whose grilled iron gateway in the midst of its manorial stone wall was quite as munificent as her own. But Gerry disappointed her. He

primarily disappointed her by meanly resorting to the habit of addressing her as "Nero" (the soubriquet of a Great Dane of uncertain temper owned by her mother) after Teddie had bit him on the wrist when forcibly held down in a bitter struggle to recover from her possession a domesticated and one-eyed Russian rat which had been indiscreet enough to invade the Hayden estate. And he finally disappointed her by abandoning his fixed intention of becoming an engine-driver and deciding to waste a once promising young life on due preparation for the study of law. Gerry, it is true, later on attempted to revive this blighted romance by bombarding her with purple-tinted boxes of English violets done up in glazed paper and surmounted by small and neatly addressed white envelopes, and sometimes with striped boxes so big they looked like baby-coffins, except for the thorny stalks which protruded from one cut-away end, until the matter-of-fact Teddie reminded him that he was wasting a tremendous amount of money, as her mother's head-gardener grew these

things in abundance. So before retiring into his professional shell Gerry was at pains to point out, in a somewhat stilted little note, that he had quite overlooked the etymology of "Tuxedo," which he found to be an Algonquin word derived from "Tuxcito," which in the original language meant "the meeting place of bears" —with the "bears" heavily underlined.

But the fact that Gerry essayed little more than a stiff bow as he passed by did not greatly trouble Teddie, for about this time she fell secretly in love with an Episcopalian curate of delicate health and indescribably melancholy eyes, a young man with a face like a Shelley and an audible and asthmatic manner of breathing. And at the same time that he sobered Teddie down a great deal his health improved perceptibly under Teddie's arduous campaign of forced feeding. She even extended those ventral activities to the despatching of marrons and *bar de luc* to hospital wards, and spoke of giving up her life to prison reform, and argued on the beauties of the monastic life, and for a time considered

taking the veil. But the Shelley with the melancholy eyes unfortunately developed a cough and for the sake of his health was transferred to a curacy in southern California. This deportation gave every promise of fanning the flame which it should have tempered, translating the exile into a figure ideally romantic—until Teddie learned that on his western migration he had inconsiderately married a certain ex-contralto of the First Presbyterian Church who had graduated into the Chautauqua Circuit.

Teddie thereupon threw herself into golf and spent whole days on the Tuxedo links, and the gardenia-white once more darkened down to the beechnut brown. She became as hard as nails, both in body and spirit, and did her best to forget to remember her asthmatic young curate's pet story of the Bishop who said "Assouan" every time he fuzzled the turf, because Assouan, of course, was acknowledged to be the biggest "dam" in the world.

But the time came when Teddie was tired of golf, just as tired of making the

rounds of her eighteen holes as she was of making the rounds of the circular ball-room of the Tuxedo Club with fox-trotting youngsters and sedately waltzing oldsters. She was tired of dinners at Table Rock, and tired of seeing the "No-One-Admitted-Without-Permit" signs, and tired of the Meadow Brook steeplechase, and tired of the stately and stupid dinners in town. She was tired of life and tired of even herself. But most of all she was tired of that complicated machinery of existence in which she found herself so inextricably enmeshed. She still dreamed of liberating herself from that ponderously engineered intricacy of protectional pulleys and powers. But even while she felt that she was encaged, encaged as a pulsing hair-spring is encaged in a watch-case of smothering gold, she scarcely knew which way to look for escape. She caught a momentary breath or two of freedom, it is true, by boldly introducing motor-polo within the "No-Admittance-Without-Permit" precincts, a brand of sublimated polo

played with a football from a runabout with a stripped *chassis*. But the gardeners and the board of governors united in objecting to the havoc wrought to the Club turf, and Monty Tilford broke an arm in one of the collisions, so a ban was put on what might have proved a belated safety-valve for Teddie's spiritual steam-chest.

Still later, however, when her mother was undergoing hydropathic revision in Virginia, she made one last and listless effort to escape by taking up flying. This she did *sub rosa* and under an assumed name, and might have medicined her mysterious ailment with tail-spins and altitude-tests, but she suffered inordinately from nose-bleed and was unfortunately snapshotted for one of the Sunday papers the same week that she taxied into a sign-board—which demanded appallingly expensive repairs to the machine and involved a crocked patella and a month or two with a crick in her knee, though it was a rather ridiculous three-hundred-word telegram from Virginia which really dis-

suaded the hangar authorities from continuing the services of their ruthlawing young novitiate.

And it was then that Teddie tipped over the apple-cart. It was then that she broke jail, and bolted, and took her life in her own hands.

She took her life in her own hands, as even humbler prisoners of circumstance had done before her, by allying herself with Art. She abjured the parental roof, leased a studio in the well-policed wilderness of Greenwich Village, and announced that she intended to express herself through the pure and impersonal medium of dry-point or modeling-clay. She wasn't quite sure which it was to be, but that was a matter of secondary importance. She panted for freedom and she didn't stop to worry over what particular hand was to bring about her liberation. She installed the wine-colored roadster in a down-town garage (to be taken out rarely and rather shamefacedly), and bought a Latin-Quarter paint-smock and bobbed her hair

and learned how to make her own coffee and manipulate a kitchenette gas-range without smothering herself.

And her old Uncle Chandler, on becoming duly acquainted with this state of affairs, assented to everything but the bobbing of the hair, which he regarded as much too lovely hair to be snipped off anybody's head. He even put the seal of his approval on her insurrection by sending down to her a hamper of potted truffles and brandied peaches.

Yet he stood aghast, the next day, when these were duly returned to him. That reversal of form, in fact, so disturbed him that he couldn't get Teddie out of his mind, for a Teddie without an appetite was a Teddie who was no longer her old self. And the more he thought about it the more he realized that it was his plain and bounden duty to go down to Greenwich Village and investigate.

"The fact of the matter is," he confidentially acknowledged to old Commodore Stillman before the hickory-logs of the

Nasturtium Club, "that girl's a demmed sight too good-looking to be left lying around loose!"

"Oh, the kid'll take care of herself all right," ventured the Commodore, with rather vivid memories of a freckled young Artemis making a polo-pony jump the tennis nets out at the Park. "And the learning how will help her. It will help her considerable!"

CHAPTER THREE

The old Major, a little out of breath from the stairs, was glad of the chance to sit down and recover himself. He was also glad that he had found the roughly scrawled "Back at Two" sign on the door and the studio still empty, for when Teddie was about there was always small chance of studying anything beyond Teddie herself.

So, having returned to a normal manner of respiration, he proceeded to a quiet but none the less critical examination of the premises. He was disturbed, on the whole, by the baldness of the dingy-walled old studio with its broken and paint-spattered floor and its big north window entirely out of alignment. There was a long cherry-wood table pretty well littered with brushes and paint-tubes and boxes of pastels and a wooden manikin and various

disjointed portions of the human figure reproduced in plaster-of-paris. And there was an easel, and an armchair draped in faded brown velvet, and a number of hammered brass things, and a castered model-platform, and a bedraggled blue canvas blouse over a chair-back, and many drawings of very lean ladies and very muscular young gentlemen thumb-tacked to the walls. And behind the studio, to the right, was a much more orderly kitchenette, and, to the left, a rather nun-like little sleeping-alcove with a couch-bed about as wide as a tombstone.

Uncle Chandler sighed with relief, for he had resolutely keyed himself up to expect what he'd called "a goulash of the Oriental stuff," with ruby lanterns and draped divans and punk-sticks in jade bowls. But Uncle Chandler found himself in what looked more like a workshop than a palm-reader's parlor, and the frown of trouble lightened a little on his wrinkled old forehead. He even took up an oblong of draughting-board and was studying a pea-

green omnibus going under a *café-au-lait* Washington Arch which veered a trifle to the right when the door opened and Teddie herself came in with a big pigskin portfolio under her arm.

"Hello there, Teddie," he said guardedly, as he watched her unspear a turbanthing of twisted velvet from her bobbed hair.

"Hello, Uncle Chandler," she rather indifferently responded as she put the pigskin portfolio on the cherrywood table. "How's the *haute monde* and your sciatica?"

"How's *l'art pour l'art?*" almost tartly responded her uncle, noting, however, with undivulged satisfaction the clear crispness of her movements and that she was thinner than usual, with an adorable little Lina-Cavaliera hollow in the center of the cheek where the butternut-brown had once more blanched into a magnolia-white.

Teddie laughed, without deigning an answer.

"How about some tea?" she said in-

stead. And without waiting for his reply she lifted out a battered old samovar and pushed the cigarettes toward his end of the table as she proceeded, somewhat more deftly than her visitor had anticipated, with the business in hand.

"About those peaches and truffles, Uncle Chandler," she said as she stooped to adjust the flickering blue flame. "I sent them back because I'm out of the flapper class now. It was kind of you, of course. But I'm no longer a schoolgirl. I've cut out that boarding-school stuff. I intend to be something more than a Strasbourg goose, and if I'm suffering from any sort of hunger, it's more a hunger of the soul than of the body."

This was a new note from Teddie, and not unlike most newnesses, it came with a slight sense of shock.

"My dear girl, I was only trying to get even with you for that—that delightful little water-color of the Palisades above Fort Lee. It was clever, my dear, and I always did like our Hudson River scenery."

Teddie stood up straight. She stood inspecting him with a cold and slightly combative eye.

"That was the Flatiron Building in a snow-storm," she somewhat frigidly explained.

"Ah!" said the astute old Major, settling into the brown-velvet armchair. "That's what I said, all along. That's precisely what I told Higginson. And Higginson, who is always a bit bullheaded, y' understand, insisted that it was Palisades, saying he'd lived on 'em all his life and ought to know. But I didn't come here to talk about Higginson. I came here to find out how you're getting along."

This was a question which Teddie found necessary to sit back and consider carefully.

"You see, Uncle Chandler, I've so much to unlearn! You can't keep a girl under glass most of her life and then expect her to horn in where the dairy-lunchers learned the game in their infancy."

The Major winced a little. Here was still another newness to disturb him, a

newness not so much of phraseology as of outlook.

"This is a new life," Teddie gravely continued, "and I've got to get in step with it or get walked over. There are people down here who have the gift of making poverty romantic, people who can turn an empty pocketbook into a sort of adventure. They can eat onion soup and *spaghetti au gratin* and wash cold-storage capon down with that *eau-de-quinine* stuff they drink and be happy on it because they know they are free, free to express themselves as they want to express themselves, free to work and live and think, and come and go as they like. And that's wonderful, Uncle Chandler, when you come to think of it."

Uncle Chandler sat thinking this over, with no ponderable amount of enthusiasm on his face.

"And just how do you intend expressing yourself?" he asked as the samovar began to bubble.

"I think it will be in color," said Teddie with the utmost solemnity. "I began with

modeling, but it was rather messy, and I didn't make much headway. I'm beginning to feel that pastel or dry-point is more my *penchant.* Raoul Uhlan is giving me three lessons a week."

"That big stiff!" ejaculated the philistine old Major.

"He's one of the cleverest painters in New York," Teddie calmly explained.

"And a professional tame-robin who gets portrait commissions, I understand, because he can dance like a stage acrobat!"

"I know nothing about his dancing," remarked Teddie, with her eyebrows up. "But I *do* know it's sinful the way the children of our idle rich are kept cooped up and shut away from real life. They're hemmed in with a lot of silly old taboos. They're laced up in a straight-jacket of social laws until they're too flabby to face a personal dilemma that an East Side shop-girl could decide before she'd finished powdering her nose."

Uncle Chandler took up his teacup and then put it down again.

"I rather fail to see what the personal

predicaments of shop-girls have got to do with the matter," he said with some acerbity. "You're a Hayden, the third wealthiest woman in Orange County, and a girl who's had every comfort that money and machinery can give her. Yet you leave a home that cost about two-thirds of a million—without counting those cross-eyed marble lions your mother brought over from Florence for the Sunken Gardens!—and come down here into this moth-eaten backyard of the Eighth Ward and live on macaroni and red ink and dream that raw life is being dished up to you on the half-shell. You talk about liberty and expressing yourself, and all you're doing is slumming, just slumming!"

Teddie smiled. It was a languid smile and a superior one.

"Uncle Chandler," she remarked, "you really don't know what you're talking about. In the first place, I've decided that in one day you can see more life, real life, out of that crooked old window there than you could discern in Tuxedo Park in a century." She ushered him toward the case-

ment in question. "Look at that Italian woman with the bundle of clothes on her head. And those kids crowding about the hokey-pokey man. And that gray-headed old candy-seller with the feather-duster in his hand. And that white hearse with the white angel kneeling on the top and that line of bareheaded Dago mourners marching along just as you'd see them in Naples or Ancona. And look at that wagon-load of crated geese that have just come from the Ganesvoort Market, with their necks craned out between the slats. Why, those poor things are fighting for liberty just about the same as I've been fighting for it!"

"And about as effectively," remarked Uncle Chandler.

"Well, whose funeral is it, anyway?" demanded Teddie, with her first touch of impatience. "This happens to be my show, and I happen to be running it in my own way. I know what's ahead of me, and I'm going straight for it."

Teddie's uncle was able to smile at the uncompromising ardor of youth. But there

was a touch of impatience in his movements as he crossed over to what he hoped might prove a more comfortable chair. He had no intention of letting a snip of a girl Cook's-guide him about his own city, the city he'd lived in for some sixty-odd years. And he wasn't such a stranger to Greenwich Village as she imagined, for through the mists of time he could still remember Ned Harrigan and Perry Street, and Sim Sharp and certain Tough Club chowders of the olden and golden days.

"So you're going straight, are you?" he snapped out, with only the light in his kindly old eyes to contradict the bruskness of his speech. "Well, all I have to say is that you're a wonder if you can go straight in a district like this. Good gad, ma'am, even the streets don't go straight down here. They're as deluded as the benzine-daubers who tramp them. And it may be none of my business, but I've an itch to know what's going to happen to a high-spirited girl who's veering dead south when she dreams she's heading due west."

"And that means," suggested Teddie,

"that you propose to hang around to see what's going to happen?"

"On the contrary, young lady, I'm going down to Hot Springs to-morrow morning to get some of the acid steamed out of my knee-joints. You're old enough to do as you like. I've always admitted that. And I've talked to Trummie about it, before he got away. I've talked to your dad. And he remarked that it wasn't a matter of such tremendous importance, after all, since he has just figured out that the planet on which we at present subsist will be completely obliterated in some six million years. And he seems to be more interested in Betelgeuse, at the moment, than he is in Greenwich Village. But I repeat that you've come into a crooked part of this old Island for any straight-cuts to freedom. You'll do just what the streets do down here: you'll get all twisted up. Just look at 'em! Look at 'em, I say. You've got Tenth Street doubling round and running into Fourth Street, and Waverley Place going in four directions at once—the same as the folks who live in it! They don't

know where they're at, none of 'em. And even the upper side of your Square here is not only Washington Square North, but also Sixth Street, and at the same time also Waverley Place again. And the east side of your same old Square is University Place down as far as Fourth Street, and then without rhyme or reason it calls itself Wooster Street. And your south side is really Fourth Street, but on Fourth Street proper the numbers increase from east to west, but on what is really the same street called Washington Square South your numbers increase from west to east. And your Square isn't even a square, but a rectangle. And if you can straighten all that out in your beautiful little bean you know your old New York a trifle better than I do—and that, I acknowledge, would be going some."

"But I'm not interested in the streets and the mail-directory numbers," Teddie patiently explained. "What I've been talking about is the spirit of the place, its aura."

"Yes, I got a sniff of it as I came

through that Italian settlement," acknowledged Uncle Chandler. "And it was quite a penetrating aura."

"But you're only croaking out of a swamp of prejudices," contended Teddie. "You don't understand our ways of living or looking at life. You try to gauge Greenwich Village, which was once good enough for Poe and Masefield, by Fifth Avenue standards, and you get your numbers mixed." She looked up at him with a more commiserative light in her earnest young eyes. "But if you want to see us as we are, why not take chow with me at the Blue Pigeon to-night?"

"Not muchee!" averred Uncle Chandler, with great alacrity. "I've altogether too much respect for my Fifth-Avenuey Little Mary. I've seen 'em before, those futuristic smoke-boxes with a tinned sardine rolled up in a pimento-skin and *Mimis* from Waterbury and up-State Villons who muss their hair and get mixed up on the garlic and free-verse. So, much as I love you, Teddie, I'll toddle along to my benighted old Nasturtium Club and deaden my soul

on Green Turtle clear and Terrapin, Philadelphia style, and breast of Chicken *Fincise* with sweet potatoes Dixie, and new peas *Saute,* and an ice and coffee to end up with."

Teddie tried to look indifferent. But it took a struggle. For her Uncle Chandler had rather disdainfully picked up an oblong of cardboard and sat inspecting it with a none too approving eye.

What he inspected was a crayon sketch of an extremely muscular right arm and shoulder, a right arm and shoulder which at least demanded some qualified respect. But his grizzled old eyebrows were closer together as he looked up at Teddie again.

"Did you say you drew from models?" he casually inquired.

"Of course," acknowledged Teddie, pausing long enough to answer her telephone and explain that she and not the landlord had ordered the new glass for the skylight.

"You don't mean to say you have men come up here and—and expose their mus-

cles for this sort of thing?" demanded Uncle Chandler, with a gesture toward the ample biceps in crayon.

Teddie laughed.

"Oh, no, that wasn't a professional model. That's the arm of Gunboat Dorgan, the prize-fighter. I sketched that the other afternoon when he was up here with Ruby Reamer, one of my regular models. He's Ruby's steady, as she calls it. She's very proud of him, and had him showing me some of his stunts. So I thought it would be a good chance to get a study of an arm like that. And Gunnie—that's what Ruby calls him—isn't a bit like what I thought a prize-fighter would be. He's rather a bright-minded boy, and a little shy, and if he wins the lightweight bout from Slim Britton, the English boxer, he's going to marry Ruby and take a flat down on Second Avenue."

"But you say he's a fighter, a ring-fighter?"

"Yes, that's how he makes his living. He's quite serious about it all, and trains

hard, and plans about working his way up, just as a man in any other profession would."

Uncle Chandler sat thinking this over. He would have done considerably more thinking if he'd been in possession of the information that his niece had already allowed this same prize-fighter to pilot her and Ruby and the wine-colored roadster out to a sea-food dinner at a Sound road-house. But even as it was, Uncle Chandler seemed sufficiently upset.

"Say, Teddikins," he somewhat grimly remarked out of the silence that had fallen over the darkening studio, "what d'you suppose your mother would think about all this?"

"I'm not in the least interested in what mother thinks about it," was Teddie's altogether irresponsible and wilful rejoinder.

The old Major, who had already risen to go, turned this speech over, turned it over with great deliberation. Then he sat down again.

"It's not so much Lydia, my dear," he said. "It's what poor old Lydia embodies,

the organized entrenchments that surround young girls, the machinery of service that may shut you in, but at the same time does things for you and gives you something to fall back on when the pinch comes!"

"But I don't understand what you mean by the pinch," Teddie told him, straightening the gardenia that stood so stiff and straight in his coat-lapel. For she liked her Uncle Chandler, and she liked him a lot. And she was a little disturbed by the look of anxiety that had come into his worldly-wise old face.

He stared at her for a moment, shrugged his shoulders, and took up his hat and stick.

"You're all right, Teddie," he announced with decision as he solemnly kissed her on the cheek-bone. "But—but I wish somebody was looking after you when I'm down there being boiled out."

This made Teddie laugh. She not only laughed, but she extended her arms, like a traffic-officer stopping a jay-driver, or a young eagle trying its wings.

"But I don't need any one to look after me, thank heaven! *I'm free!*"

The old Major stopped at the door.

"And you feel that you can manage it all right? That you can——"

For reasons entirely his own he did not finish the sentence.

"I *am* managing it," the girl quietly asserted.

And Uncle Chandler, in finally taking his departure, experienced at least a qualified relief. The girl was wrong, all wrong. And what was worse, she was much too lovely to the eye to remain unmolested by predaceous man. But she had a will of her own, had Teddie. And, what was more, she might have gone to Paris to "express herself," as she called it. Or she might have tried to find her soul by going on the stage. And the Major knew well enough what that would have meant. After all, the girl would learn to scratch for herself. She would have to. And as old Stillman had intimated, it might do her a world of good!

CHAPTER FOUR

Teddie, as a matter-of-fact girl, had scant patience with the undue attribution of the romantic to the commonplace. Yet the manner in which she had first met Raoul Uhlan, it must be admitted, was not without its touch of the picturesque.

Teddie, still a little intoxicated with her new-found liberty, and further elated by the sparkling morning sunshine of Fifth Avenue, was swinging smartly up that slope which an over-busy world no longer remembers as Murray Hill. She was in a slightly shortened blue serge skirt that whipped against her slim young knees suggestively akin to the drapery of the *Nike* of Samothrace, and was just approaching the uplands of the Public Library Square when she caught sight of a violet-peddler.

A glimpse of the seven earthy-smelling clumps of bloom, buskined in tin-foil and

neatly arranged on their little wooden tray, promptly intrigued the girl into stopping, fumbling in her none too orderly hand-bag, and passing over to the sloe-eyed Greek a bank-note with double-X's imprinted on its silk-threaded surface. And having adjusted the sword-knotted clump to her belt by means of one of the peddler's glass-headed pins, she looked up to see this same peddler contemplating the bank-note with a frown of perplexity. He was explaining, in broken English, that his exchequer stood much too limited to make change for a bill so big. Then, with a smile of inspiration, he placed the tray of violets in the girl's hands, pointed toward a near-by store on the side-street, and plainly implied that he would break the twenty and return with more negotiable currency.

So Teddie stood patiently holding the tray of violets, in the clear white light of the sunny Avenue, happy in the flowery perfumes which were being wafted up to her delicately distended nostril.

But something else was at the same time being wafted in Teddie's direction. It was

a tall and handsome stranger in tight-fitting tweeds, carrying a cane and an air of preoccupation. There was lightness in his step, notwithstanding his size, and any unseemly amplitude of ventral contour was fittingly corrected by a tightly laced obesity-belt, just as the somewhat heavy line of the lips was lightened by a short-trimmed and airily-pointed mustache. For the stranger was Raoul Uhlan, and Raoul Uhlan was an artist, though any thoughtless motion-picture director who had dared to flash him on the screen as a type of his profession would have been held up to ridicule and reproof. But this particular artist, who was neither dreamy-eyed nor addicted to velveteen jackets, found the quest of beauty both a professional and a personal necessity. So when he beheld a young lady of most unmistakable charm standing beside a gray-stone retaining wall with a street-peddler's violet-tray in her hands, he momentarily forgot about the prospective sitter from Pittsburgh with whom he was to breakfast. He hove-to in the offing, in fact, for the seemingly inno-

cent purpose of buying a boutonnière. It would be gracious, he also decided as he soberly inquired the price of violets that morning, to give the little thing a thrill. For Raoul often wondered what it was about him that made him so attractive to women.

"One dollar a bunch," soberly responded the little thing, in answer to his question, giving scant evidence of being thrilled. She was uncertain about prices, and her thoughts, in fact, were fixed on the matter of not cheating the humble and honest tradesman whose wares had been delegated to her hands. She noticed the strange man's momentary wince, but never dreamed it arose from a confrontation with profiteering. She nonchalantly took his dollar, however, tucked it into one corner of the tray, and handed him the violets and the essential pin.

She was quite prepared to repeat the operation with a dandified old gentleman in pearl spats, who was hovering near, when an officer in uniform sauntered up and, being out of sorts with the world that

morning, confronted her with a lowering and saturnine brow.

"Yuh gotta license t' peddle them flowers?" he demanded.

Teddie, in no wise disturbed, explained the situation and further announced that the gentleman who owned the tray would return immediately.

Her urbanity, however, was wasted on the Avenue air.

"Yuh just made a sale to this guy here, didn't yuh?" persisted the officer of the law, with a none too respectful thumb-jerk toward the immaculately tweeded figure with the over-sized bouquet in his button-hole.

"Yes, this is the dollar he paid me," Teddie sweetly acknowledged.

"That's enough," averred her persecutor. "Yuh're street peddlin' without a license. So yuh'll have to come along wit' me."

"But, odd as it may seem, I rather want my nineteen dollars," maintained Teddie, with an intent gaze down the side-street.

"Your nineteen dollars and seventy-five

cents," corrected the man in tweeds, not forgetful of a recent extortion.

"Yuh're likely to clap eyes on that Dago again, ain't yuh!" The open scorn of the officer was monumental. "He'll be spendin' what's left of his days tryin' to ferret yuh out, I s'pose, wastin' his young life away battlin' to get that easy coin back to yuh! What he's breakin' now isn't a twenty-dollar bill, my gerrl, but a travelin' record down to the Third Ward. And I guess the sooner yuh come along wit' me, and the quieter yuh come, the better."

"But you really can't do this sort of thing, you know, Officer," the man in tweeds interposed. "This girl——"

"Yuh shut your trap," announced the upholder of law and order, with an indifferent side-glance at the interloper, "or I'll gather yuh in wit' the dame here."

"That's an eventuality which I'd rather welcome," averred the other, with his blood up.

"All right, then, come along, the both o' yuh," was the prompt and easy re-

sponse. "And come quick or I'll make it a double pinch for blockin' traffic."

But Raoul Uhlan, clinging to what was left of his dignity, insisted on calling a taxi-cab (which Teddie paid for when they arrived at the Forty-Seventh Street station-house) and in transit managed to say many soothing and valorous things, so that by the time Teddie stood before a somewhat grim-looking desk in the neighboring receiving depot for miscreants, her courage had come back to her and she didn't even resort to home addresses and influences for a short-cut out of her difficulty. She soon had the satisfaction, indeed, of seeing her moody patrolman picturesquely berated by his higher official behind the desk, who apologized for retaining the dollar-bill and the tray of violets and announced that as there was no case and no charge against her—which any one but a pin-headed flatty with a double-barreled grouch could have seen!—she was quite free to enjoy the morning air once more.

So Teddie sallied forth with a great load off her mind and with Raoul Uhlan at her side. And the latter, instead of breakfasting with the plutocrat from Pittsburgh who wished to perpetuate his obesity in oils, sent a polite fib of explanation over the wires which were more or less inured to such things, and carried Teddie off to luncheon at the Brevoort, where he learned that she was one of the Haydens of Tuxedo and had a studio on the fringe of Greenwich Village and wanted to paint. And before she quite knew how it had all been arranged it was agreed that Uhlan was to come three times a week and give her lessons in Art, for the sake of Art.

CHAPTER FIVE

It wasn't until the third lesson that Teddie, even through her self-immuring hunger for knowledge, began to doubt the wisdom of her arrangement with Raoul Uhlan. She began to dislike the perfume with which this master of the brush apparently anointed his person, just as she detected a growing tendency to emigrate from the realms of pure Art to the airier outlands of more personal issues. She was as clean of heart as she was clear of head, and she resented what began to dawn on her as the rather unnecessary physical nearness of the man as he corrected her drawing or pointed out her deficiencies in composition. But his knowledge was undeniable, and his criticisms were true. She was learning something. She was unquestionably getting somewhere. So she refused to see what she had no wish to see.

She endured the uliginous oyster of self-esteem for the white pearl of knowledge that it harbored.

But on the day after the talk with her Uncle Chandler, when the next lesson was under way, a new disquiet crept through her. The man seemed to be forgetting himself. Instead of studying her over-scrambled color-effects he seemed intent on studying the much more bewitching lines of her forward-thrust chin and throat. Once, when he leaned closer, apparently by accident, she moved away, apparently without thought. It both puzzled and disturbed her, for she had not remained as oblivious as she pretended to his stare of open hunger. Yet the intentness of his gaze, as he attempted to lock glances with her, turned out to be a bullet destined forever to fall short of its target. He was, in fact, wasting his time on a Morse-code of the soul which had no distinct meaning to her. He was lavishing on her a slowly-perfected technique for which she had no fit and proper appreciation. Teddie, in

fact, didn't quite know what he was driving at.

It wasn't until she realized, beyond all measure of doubt, that the repeated contact of his shoulder against hers was not accidental that a faint glow of revulsion, shot through with anger, awakened in her. But her inner citadels of fear remained uninvaded. She had nipped more than one amatory advance in the bud, in her time. With one brief look, long before that, she had blighted more than one incipient romance. Her scorn was like a saber, slender and steel-cold, and she could wield it with the impersonal young brutality of youth. And it had always been sufficient.

When he stood close behind her, as she still sat confronting her sketch, and, as he talked, placed his left hand on the shoulder of her blue canvas blouse, and then, leaning closer, caught in his big bony hand her small hand that held the pencil, to guide it along the line it seemed unable to follow, she told herself that he was merely intent on correcting her drawing. But a trouble,

vague and small as the worry of a mouse behind midnight wainscotting, began to nibble at her heart. For that enclosing big hand was holding her own longer than need be, that small horripilating disturbance of her hair was something more than accidental. The small nibble of trouble grew into something disturbing, something almost momentous, something to be stopped without loss of time.

She got up sidewise from her chair, with a half-twist of the torso that was an inheritance from her basketball days. It freed her without obvious effort from all contact with the over-intimate leaning figure. She even retained possession of the crayon-pencil, which she put down beside her Nile-green brush-bowl after crossing the room to the blackwooded console between the two windows.

"I guess that will about do us for to-day, won't it?" she said in her quiet and slightly reedy voice as she proceeded, with deluding grave impersonality, to open one of the windows.

But he crossed the room after her and stood close beside her at the window. He towered above her in his bigness like something taurine, alert and yet ponderously calm.

"Why are you afraid of me?" he asked, with his eyes on the gardenia-white oval of her cheek.

"I'm not," she replied with a crisp small laugh like the stirring of chopped ice in a wine-cooler. "I'm not in the least afraid of you."

A less obtuse man would have been chilled by the scorn in her voice. But Uhlan was too sure of his ground, his all too familiar ground, to heed side-issues.

"It's you who makes me afraid of myself," he murmured, stooping closer to her. He spoke quite collectedly, though his face was a shade paler than before.

"You said to-morrow at three, I believe," she observed in an icily abstracted voice. That tone, she remembered, had always served its purpose. It was conclusive, coolly dismissive. For she still re-

fused to dignify that approach with opposition. She declined to recognize it, much less to combat it.

"Did I?" he said in a genuinely abstracted whisper, for his mind was not on what he said or heard. His mind, indeed, was fixed on only one thing. And that was her utterly defenseless loveliness. The blackness of his pupils and the aquiline cruelty about the corner of his eyes frightened her even more than his pallor.

But she did not give way to panic, for to do so was not the custom of her kind. She fought down her sudden weak impulse to cry out, her equally absurd propulsion to flight, her even more ridiculous temptation to break the window-panes in front of her with her clenched fist and scream for help.

For she realized, even before he made a move, that he was impervious to the weapons that had always served her. He stood beyond the frontiers of those impulses and reactions in which she moved and had her being. The very laws of her

world meant nothing to him. It was like waking up and finding a burglar in the house, a burglar who knew no law but force.

So she wheeled slowly about, with her head up, watching him. There was a blaze like something perilously close to hate in her slightly widened eyes, for she knew, now, what lay ahead of her. Instinct, in one flash, told her what lurked beside her path. And her inability to escape it, to confront it with what it ought to be confronted with, was maddening.

"*You Hun!*" she said in a passionate small moan of misery which he mistook for terror. "Oh, you Hun!"

He could afford to smile down at her, fortified by her loss of fortitude, warm with the winy ichors of mastery.

"You adorable kid!" he cried out, catching the hand which she reached out to the window-frame to steady herself with.

"Don't *touch* me!" she called out in a choking squeak of anger. And this time, as he swung her about, he laughed openly.

"You wonderful little wildcat!" he murmured, as he pinned her elbows close to her sides and drew her, smothered and helpless, in under the wing of his shoulder.

For a moment or two she fought with all that was left of her strength, writhing and twisting and panting, struggling to free her pinioned arms. Then she ceased, abruptly, devastated, not so much by her helplessness as by the ignominy of her efforts. She went limp in his arms as he forced back her head, and with his arm encircling her shoulders, kissed her on the mouth.

He stopped suddenly, perplexed by her passiveness, even suspecting for a moment that she might have fainted. But he found himself being surveyed with a tight-lipped and narrow-eyed intentness which shot a vague trouble through his triumph. He even let his arms drop, in bewilderment, though the drunkenness had not altogether gone out of his eyes.

She was wiping her mouth with her handkerchief, with a white look of loathing on her face. She was still mopping her

lips as she crossed to the studio door and swung it open.

"But I didn't say I was going," he demurred, frowning above his smile. He was sure of himself, sure of his mastery, sure of his technique.

"*You are going,*" she said, slowly and distinctly.

He stood there, as she repeated those three flat-toned words of hers, reviewing his technique, going back over it, for some undivulged imperfection. For it was plain that she piqued him. She more than piqued him; she disturbed him. But he refused to sacrifice his dignity for any such momentary timidity. It was familiar ground to him; each endearing move and maneuver was instinctive with him. Only the type was new. And novelty was not to be scoffed at.

He was smiling absently as he picked up his hat and gloves from the cherrywood table. And he stopped in front of her, still smiling, on his way out.

"Remember, wild-bird, that I am coming back to-morrow," he said, arrested in spite

of himself by the beauty of the white face with the luminous eyes. "To-morrow, at three!"

She did not look at him. She didn't even bother to attempt to look through him.

"You are not coming back," she quietly explained.

Already, she knew, all the doors of all the world were closed between them. The thing seemed so final, so irrefutably over and done with, that there was even a spurning touch of weariness in her tone. But he refused to be spurned.

"I am coming back," he maintained, facing the eyes which refused to meet his, speaking more violently than he had at first intended to speak. "I am coming back again, as sure as that sun is shining on those housetops out there. I'm coming back, and I'm going to take you in my arms again. For I'm going to tame you, you crazy-hearted little stormy petrel, even though I have to break down that door of yours, and break down that pride of yours, to do it!"

She went whiter than ever as she stood

there with her hand on the door-knob. She stood there for what seemed a very long time.

"To-morrow at three," she repeated in her dead voice, with just the faintest trace of a shiver shaking her huddled figure. It was not altogether a question; it was not altogether an answer.

But it was enough for Uhlan, who passed with a dignity not untouched with triumph out through the open door. Yet Teddie's shiver, as she stood staring after him, was the thoracic râle of her youth. And down on her protesting body, for the first time in her life, pressed a big flanged instrument with indented surfaces, like a pair of iron jaws from which she could not entirely free herself.

CHAPTER SIX

THEODORA LYDIA LORILLARD HAYDEN, confronted by the first entirely sleepless night of her career, hugged her wounded pride to her breast and went pioneering. She lay on her narrow bed blazing new trails of thought. She turned and twisted and waited for morning, as torn in spirit as a Belgian villager over whom the iron hooves of war had trampled. For she found herself a victim of strange and violent reactions and her body a small but seething cauldron of bitterness.

The more she thought of Raoul Uhlan and his affront to her the more she hated him. The scene in her studio began to take on the distorted outlines of a nightmare, merging into something as disquieting as remembered dreams of being denuded. Even when the ordained reactions of nature demanded lassitude after tempest she

found the incandescent coals of her hatred fanned by the thought of her helplessness. For it was for more than the mere indignities to her person that she hated the man. She hated him for crushing down with an over-brutal heel the egg-shell dream of her emancipation. She hated him for defiling her peace of mind, for undermining her faith in a care-free world which she had fought so hard to attain. He had done more than hurt her pride; he had shaken her temple of art down about her ears.

Teddie began to see, as she felt seismic undulations in what she had so foolishly accepted as bed-rock, that her home-life had perhaps stood for more than she imagined. It had meant not an accidental but an elaborately sustained dignity, a harboring seclusion, an achieved though cluttered-up spaciousness where the wheels of existence revolved on bearings so polished that one was apt to forget their power. And all this took her thoughts on to Ruby Reamer, the businesslike young girl of the studios from whom, without quite realizing it, she had learned so much.

Beside the worldly-wise and sophisticated Ruby, Teddie remembered, she had more than once felt like a petted and pampered and slightly over-fed Pomeranian beside a quick-witted street-wanderer who'd only too early learned to forage for a living. And the question as to what Ruby might do in any such contingency led her to a calmer and colder assessment of her own resources.

But these, she found, were even more limited than she had imagined. There seemed no one to whom she could turn in her emergency, no one to whom she could look for any restoration of dignity without involving some still greater loss of dignity. And that one word of "dignity," for all her untoward impulses of insurrection, was a very large word in the lexicon of Teddie's life. She had been mauled and humiliated. She had been unthinkably misjudged and cheapened. And it was as much the insult to her intelligence as the hammer-blow to her pride which made her ache with the half-pagan hunger of rebellious youth for adequate atonement.

It wasn't until daylight came that any possible plan of procedure presented itself. Then, as she paced her studio in the more lucid white light of morning, with the sheathed blade of her indignation still clanking at her heels, her eye fell on the crayon sketch of Gunboat Dorgan's well muscled right arm.

She stopped short, arrested by a thought as new as though it had bloomed out of the cherrywood table beside her. Then she sat down in the velvet-draped armchair, letting this somewhat disturbing thought slip from her head to her heart, as it were, where it paced its silent parliaments of instinct until she had breakfasted. In leaving it thus to instinct she felt that she was leaving it to a conference of ancestral ghosts to argue over and fight out to a finish. But when that decision was once made she accepted it without questioning. Her only hope, she suddenly felt, lay in Gunboat Dorgan. Her only chance of balancing life's ledger of violence rested with that East Side youth with the foreshortened Celtic nose and the cauliflower ear.

It was Gunboat Dorgan who could do for her what the situation demanded.

Her only way of getting in touch with young Dorgan, she remembered, was through Ruby Reamer. But Ruby's telephone number had been left with her in case of need, and with impulse still making her movements crisp she went to the telephone and called up her model.

"Ruby," she said in the most matter-of-fact tone of which she was capable, "can you tell me where I can find your friend, Mr. Dorgan?"

There was a ponderable space of silence.

"And what do you want with me friend Mr. Dorgan?" asked the voice over the wire, not without a slight saber-edge of suspicion.

Teddie entrenched herself behind a timely but guarding trill of laughter.

"It's for something I can't very well tell you," she said, "something that I'll be able to explain to you later on."

And again a silence that was obviously meditative intervened.

"Of course I've never tried to butt in

on Gunnie's personal affairs," announced a somewhat dignified Miss Reamer, remembering that the lady on the other end of the wire was much more attractive than anything she could fashion out of pastels. "But when Gunnie makes a date he's never held himself above explainin' it to me."

Teddie fortified herself with a deep breath.

"Then suppose we leave the explaining to him, when he feels that the psychological moment has arrived," she suggested. "So I'll be obliged if you can tell me just where and how I might get in touch with Mr. Dorgan?"

"I guess maybe you'll find him at the Aldine Athletic Club about this time any morning," Ruby finally conceded, without any perceptible decrease of dignity. And with that the conference ended.

It took time, however, to get in touch with the gentleman in question. It was, in fact, three long hours before Gunboat had finished with his boxing-class at the Aldine Athletic Club, had taken his shower and his rub-down, and had apparelled himself in

attire befitting a call on a rib, as he expressed it, who could bed her ponies down in bank-notes if she had a mind to. When he appeared before Teddie, accordingly, he did so in oxblood shoes and light tan gloves and a close-fitting "college" suit that translated him into anything but a knight of brawn.

"Mr. Dorgan," promptly began Teddie, with a quietness which was merely a mask to her inner excitement, "I'm in a very great difficulty and I've been wondering if you'd be willing to help me out of it."

"What's the trouble, lady?" asked Gunboat, a little stiff and embarrassed in his Sunday best as he gazed at her out of an honest but guarded eye. For the knights of the ring, in their own world and in their own way, have many advances of the softer sex to withstand and many blandishments of the rose-sheathed enemy to be wary of.

But Teddie was direct enough, once she was under way.

"I've just been insulted in this studio by a brute who calls himself a man, intolerably and atrociously insulted."

Gunboat Dorgan's face lost a little of its barricaded look. This was a matter which brought him back to earth again. And Teddie saw that nothing was to be gained by beating about the bush.

"And this man threatens to come here to-day and repeat that insult," she went on. "And, to speak quite plainly, I want some one to protect me."

Gunboat's face brightened. He moistened a hard young lip with the point of his tongue as he stood gazing into clouded eyes for which lances would surely have been shattered at Ashley.

"Who's the guy what's been gettin' fresh?" he demanded.

Teddie, looking very lovely in a tailored black suit with an Ophelia rose pinned to its front, did her best to resist all undue surrender to the lethal tides of sympathy.

"It's a beast called Raoul Uhlan," she announced, disturbed for a moment by the slenderness of her would-be champion. But it was only for a moment, for she remembered the flexed right arm Ruby Reamer had tried to caliper with her ad-

miring fingers on the afternoon that the crayon-drawing had been made.

"That puddin'!" cried Gunboat, with a touch of ecstasy. "Why, that guy tried to pull the soft stuff with Ruby last winter, but nothin' put me wise until it was six months too late." He fell to pacing the studio-rug, as though it were a roped ring, with significant undulatory movement of the shoulders. "Say, lady, what d' yuh want me to do to that cuff-shooter? Blot 'im out?"

There was a hard light in the pagan young eyes of the girl in black.

"Yes," she announced, without hesitation.

"Then he'll get his!" affirmed the other, just as promptly.

"I want you to give him a lesson that he'll never, never forget," she explained, a little paler than usual. "I want you to show him it isn't safe to insult defenseless girls."

"Oh, I'll show 'im!" announced Gunboat, with his chin out and his heels well apart. "He'll know something when I get

through wit' him. And he'll have a map like a fried egg!"

"But I don't want you to——"

"Leave that to me, lady," interrupted her champion, sensing what he recognized as purely feminine compunctions. "Yuh've gotta know when to quit, in this business, the same as when to start. Just leave it to me, and I'll do it, and do it right!"

"And what," demanded Teddie in the most businesslike tone of which she was capable, "will you expect me to pay you for this?"

"Pay me?" repeated Gunboat Dorgan, wheeling about on her. "Who said anything about a purse in this bout? I'm not doin' this for pay."

"Then what are you doing it for?" asked the slightly perplexed Teddie.

"I'm doin' it for *yuh!*" asserted Gunboat, leaning fraternally over the table-end.

"I've that little club-roadster of my own," the entirely unpractical Teddie rather feebly suggested, feeling the appropriateness of some effort to depersonal-

ize the issue. "It wouldn't be pay, of course. But when you and Ruby settle down in your flat it would be nice for running out into the country in hot weather. You'd take *that,* surely?"

Gunboat essayed a hand-movement of repudiation which he'd seen quite often in the movies. He was warmly conscious, in fact, of an appeasing touch of the theatrical in this knight-errantry that had bobbed so unexpectedly up at the tail end of a humdrum morning of dub-drilling and bag-punching.

"Noth-thing doin'!" he said with decision. "I get enough out of it when I see that stiff go to the mat. Yuh say he's goin' to horn in here at three o'clock. Well, I'll breeze in at three-two, railroad time. And I'll learn him to think twice before he flies that zooin'-bug around a girl who's been born and bred a lady!"

And even Teddie, as she stood up and shook hands with her new-found champion, was troubled by a vague yet persistent touch of theatricality about the situation

as a whole. But she had made her decision, and she intended to stick to it.

She watched Gunboat step to the door, with his hat in his hand, come to a stop, and then step back to the table-end.

"Say," he said with a slightly self-conscious and not altogether heroic look on his face, "don't say anything to—to Miss Reamer about this, lady, if yuh don't mind. It's not that I've got anything to hide. But yuh know what women are!"

And, with an even more fraternal nod of the head, he passed out through the door with his peculiarly light and panther-like tread, and was gone.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"Come in," said Teddie, rather shakily.

The bronze Moorish knocker on her studio-door had sounded ominously through the quietness, and even that second wind of courage which had come to her at the eleventh hour seemed to vanish before a sudden and rather breathless sense of impending culmination, not unlike that which once thrilled her childish body when an asbestos stage-curtain rolled up.

For thirty tense minutes, indeed, Teddie had been doing her best to work on a sketch of the Macauley Mission by Moonlight, slightly bewildered by the discovery that an ineradicable quaver in her fingers was giving uninvited Childe-Hassan vibrations to her lines. And now she had no need to

look still again at her watch to become aware of the fact that it was exactly three minutes to three.

If her visitor was Raoul Uhlan, she remembered, that meant five full minutes before Gunboat Dorgan would arrive on the scene. It would be five full minutes, even though Gunboat should keep his word and be on time. It meant three hundred precious seconds, she reminded herself with an involuntary tremor, in which almost anything could happen.

Even before the door quietly opened, in fact, Teddie found herself failing to feel as valorous as she had expected. She hadn't slept well, and she hadn't eaten well, and the more she had thought over the melodrama which she was engineering into the dove-breasted days of her tranquillity the more disquieting the entire arrangement became to her. And her emotions were still playing tennis with her resolution, making her dread at one moment that her enemy might fail to appear and leaving her afraid the next moment that he might indeed return.

Then she abruptly realized that the question was already settled. For she knew, as she saw Raoul Uhlan step quietly into the studio and close the door behind him, that the die was cast, that it was already too late to evade that intimidating final issue. Yet her visitor, as he crossed smilingly to the table where she sat, carried less of the air of a cave-man than she had expected. There was a carnation in his button-hole and an air of relief touched with meekness on a face plainly more pallid than usual. He stood looking down at her with mournful and slightly reproving eyes.

"Don't be afraid of me," he murmured, as he put down his hat and gloves without letting his gaze for one moment wander from her face.

"I'm not," asserted Teddie, quite bravely, as she rose to her feet. But there was a tremor in her voice, for his meekness, she already realized, was merely a mask. And inapposite as it may have been, he impressed her as being pathetic, as pathetic as a ponderous and full-blooded

ruminant of the herd already marked for slaughter by the butcher's appraising eye.

"But you're pale," said Uhlan with all the *vox tremolo* stops pulled out. And she was able to wonder how often he had fluttered the dove-cotes of feminine emotion with those intimately lowered yet vibrant chest-tones of his. Her mind leapt to the conclusion, even before he placed one hand on her shoulder, that he was serenely sure of himself. Yet his sheer effrontery, his immeasurable vanity, tended to stabilize her when she stood most in need of such adjustment. She shook the appropriating hand from her blouse-shoulder and fell back a few steps, eying him intently. For she was swept by a sudden and belated impulse to save him from himself, to warn him off from the dead-fall into which he was so stupidly blundering.

"There's just one thing I want to say to you, that I *must* say to you," she told him, still in the grip of that forlorn impulse to escape from it all while escape was yet possible. But he advanced confidently, step by step, as she retreated.

"What's the use of wasting words?" he softly inquired.

"But they won't be wasted," cried the girl.

"Everything that keeps me from remembering will be wasted!"

"Remembering what?"

"That you waited in for me! Everything but that will be wasted," he reminded her. "At first I was afraid, terribly afraid, that you wouldn't be here when I came. But you knew that I was coming, and you stayed! And that's all I want to know."

"Do you know why I stayed?" she demanded, whiter than ever, stunned by the colossal egotism that could assume so much.

"Yes—for this," was his reply as he took possession of the two barricading arms in their loose-sleeved blouse.

She tried to gasp out a desperate "Wait!" but he smothered the cry on her lips. It was not a scream that she gave voice to, when she could catch her breath, but more a moan of hate tangled up with horror.

And it was at that precise moment that Gunboat Dorgan stepped into the room.

Teddie's persecutor, with one quick glance over his shoulder, saw the intruder. He saw the younger man in the natty high-belted sophomoric-looking suit that gave him the beguiling air of a stripling, saw him standing there, studiously arrested, appraisingly alert, with anticipation as sweet to his palate as a chocolate-drop is sweet to the tongue of a street urchin.

"And what do *you* want?" demanded Uhlan, with one appropriative arm still grasping the girl in the paint-smudged smock.

"I want yuh," announced Gunboat Dorgan, shedding his coat with one and only one miraculously rapid movement of the arms.

The big portrait-painter slowly released his hold. His face hardened. Then he looked sharply at Teddie. Then he looked even more sharply at the audacious youth who had so significantly kicked a chair away from the center of the room.

"What does all this mean?" he de-

manded, drawing himself up, for Gunboat Dorgan was already advancing toward him.

"It means I'm going to pound this zooin'-bug out o' your fat carcase," cried the smaller man, with exultation in his kindling Celtic eyes.

And Teddie, overcome by what she knew to be so imminent, tried to call out "Stop!" tried to say "No, no; it's too——"

But she was too late.

For the second time in one day Raoul Uhlan was guilty of a grave error in judgment. He decided to show the Celtic intruder in shirt-sleeves that he intended to pursue his own paths without the intervention of others. He decided to show this diminutive intruder that a man of his dimensions and determination wasn't to be trifled with. But something altogether unexpected seemed to intervene. That decision, in some way, evaporated under sudden and unlooked-for thuds of pain, thuds which, in the haze that enveloped him, he found it hard to account for. He was, in

fact, suddenly subjected to many experiences which were hard to account for, the principal one being a misty wonder as to why an opponent so insignificant to the eye could be so explosive in his movements, so devastating in his fore-shortened arm-strokes.

Not that the big-framed artist didn't resist, and resist to the last of his strength. But the thing became loathsome to the girl, who no longer stood aside in a cold and impersonal fury. For the nose above the once airy mustache bled prodigiously and left tell-tale maculations on the studio-floor. The easel went down with a crash, and gasps and grunts became odiously labored. The dazed big frame staggered back and wabbled against the table, and Teddie, realizing that she had trifled with darker and deeper currents than she had dreamed, felt a good deal like a murderess, and could stand it no more. She was a trifle faint and sick and uncertain in the knee-joints.

"Oh, take him away, take him away!"

she pleaded childishly, with her hands held over her face to shut out the horror of it all.

And the triumphant Gunboat Dorgan took him away, an inert and unprotesting hulk that was anything but good to look upon, a disheveled somnambulist with a right eye that was already beginning to close.

Gunboat took the vanquished one to the stairway, and started him down, and then flung his hat and gloves after him.

When the youth with the cauliflower ear stepped back into the studio and closed the door he already seemed to have himself well in hand. He was flushed and a little warm, but outwardly unruffled. He put on his coat and came and stood over Teddie where she sat limp and white, staring down at the overturned easel. And he in turn stood staring down at her, with his head a little to one side.

"Yuh're a thoroughbred," he averred with unqualified admiration. "Yuh're a thoroughbred, and I'm for yuh, lady, to the last jab!"

Whereupon Teddie, who felt tragically alone in the world, began to cry.

"Hully gee, don't do that," implored her protector, genuinely disturbed.

But Teddie, oblivious of his presence, sat there with the tears welling from her eyes. She wept without sound or movement, with her face buried in her hands.

"Why, your gink's canned f'r yuh, f'r good," he explained as he made a roughly gentle effort to draw her hands away from her wet face.

"Oh, please go away," said the weak-voiced girl, with a revulsion of feeling which left utter solitude the only thing to be desired.

But Gunboat Dorgan had experienced his own revulsions of feeling. And he was flushed now with something more than victory.

"Say, Ruby's all right," he confidentially acknowledged. "But this sure puts her in the discard. And what's more, I'm glad things broke the way they did. I'm mighty glad it was *me* you got to put this thing straight. And——"

"I want to be alone," moaned Teddie through her tear-wet fingers.

"Of course yuh do," acknowledged her new-found knight. "And yuh will be. But if I'm goin' to hit those Long Island resorts in a li'l club roadster when the hot weather comes, I'd like to think it's goin' to be *wit' yuh!*"

And before she quite realized what he meant Gunboat Dorgan had caught her up and kissed her on the tear-stained cheek.

"Y' understand don't yuh!" he said, laughing a little triumphantly at the stricken light which came into her eyes.

She stood up, dizzy, gathering her breath to say what she had to say. But he pushed her back gently into her chair, with a smile that was both a little shy and a little proprietary. Then he slipped out of the room with his light and panther-like step, leaving her with the bed-rock of existence no longer merely undulating, but fallen utterly away.

11/6-1930.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Since thinness of skin seems to stand an immediate though unhappy corollary to blueness of blood, Theodora Lydia Lorillard Hayden, being an aristocrat, even if one under protest, found herself without that indurated armor which protects her humbler fellow-beings from the buffets and shocks of fate. So her spirit still winced at the thought of what she had passed through. Her body still alternately flushed with indignation and chilled with a tangle of fears. Something, she knew, was about to happen, was bound to happen. Yet what this was she had neither the power nor the inclination to fathom. She merely waited, sure only of the recurring waves of desolation which beat upon her soul. She even struggled to escape from this denuding loneliness, the next morning, by trying to lose herself in her work. But so small and

trivial did that work now stand to her that it seemed like trying to bury her bruised and burning body in a bird-bath.

Yet by both temperament and habit she was averse to passivity. She hated the thought of sitting back in vague but enveloping apprehension of the unknown. She reached a point, in fact, where she would have been willing to see the blue deliver its bolt, where she would have welcomed, for the sheer relief of action, the end of that deluding interregnum of silence.

She started nervously, none the less, when her telephone bell broke the silence, an hour later, for that shrill of sound suddenly translated itself into something as ominous as the starting-gong of undefined combat. She even hesitated, for a moment, as to whether or not she would answer that call. But besides being tired of silence and indecision she was a person of habitual promptitude in movement. So temperament in the end asserted itself. With a deep breath, she took the receiver from its hook and answered the call.

"This is William Shotwell, the senior

member of the firm of Shotwell, Attridge and Bannister, speaking," a suave and dignified voice announced over the wire, once she had acknowledged her identity. "And I've been wondering, Miss Hayden, if it would be convenient for you to drop down to my office some time this afternoon for a short conference?"

"And what would the nature and object of that conference be?" inquired Teddie, as coolly as she was able.

"That, I'm afraid, is a matter it would be inexpedient to discuss over the telephone," was the none too tranquillizing response. "But I might mention that the client whose interests I am compelled to look after in this case is Mr. Raoul Uhlan, the well-known portrait-painter."

A cold chill crept slowly up through Teddie's body.

"I really don't think it would be possible for me to come down to your office," she said in an exceptionally controlled voice. She was going to add "Either this afternoon or any other afternoon," but instinct told her to suppress the impulse.

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"In that case," continued the persistently suave voice, "perhaps it would be advisable for me to run up to see you, so that there may be no undue loss of time."

Teddie wavered, for all too recent events had been combining to test the metal of her emancipation. Yet disturbed as she may have been, she was not without still undrained reservoirs of courage.

"Yes, that might be better," she finally admitted.

"I shall be up within an hour," was the crisp ultimatum with which the brief colloquy was concluded.

And Teddie, reverting to her pretense of working, felt more than ever alone in the world. Life seemed emptier than on the day she had learned her curate had married the Chautauqua singer, emptier even than that black day when the butler, acting under orders from above-stairs, had drowned her mongrel pup for merely eating the tapestry off a library Chesterfield. And her new environment, as she stared about the high-ceilinged studio, seemed to stand as bald as that denuded

Chesterfield had stood, as destitute of padded graces and relieving softnesses, an empty and ugly skeleton, a thing of obtruding bones quite barren of comfort.

It accordingly relieved Teddie not a little, when Mr. William Shotwell arrived, to find him quite urbane and fatherly, although he did seem to survey her somewhat bald-looking studio with a momentary frown of perplexity. Then, removing his *pince-nez,* he was at pains to remind her that he had met that estimable lady, her mother, during his activities as an officer of the Cooperative Social Settlement Society, and had dined with her equally estimable father three years before at the annual banquet of the Astronomical Club, and stood in no way ignorant of the position and prestige which her family might claim both in the Tuxedo colony and the City itself. He appeared so reluctant to come to the point, in fact, that the none-too-patient Teddie was compelled to prod him on a bit. And even then he seemed to hesitate so long that Teddie, with a sinking heart, began to wonder if Raoul Uhlan had

passed away from his injuries and she was about to be indicted as a murderess.

Seeing that sharp look of distress in her eyes, the attorney for the plaintiff became more urbane than ever, and protested that from the first he had advocated adjustment of some sort, a quiet and respectable settlement out of court that would cast no reflection on a family as prominent as hers and would obviate, of course, a distressing and perhaps humiliating campaign of publicity.

"I'll be greatly obliged," cried Teddie, shouldered over the brink of patience, "if you'll tell me just what you're driving at."

"I'm driving at this," responded William Shotwell, with a slight evaporation of urbanity and a corresponding hardening of face-lines: "my client, Raoul Uhlan, is now under the care of a doctor, under the care of *two* doctors, I might add, as the result of an assault which he sustained in this studio some twenty-four hours ago."

"Oh!" said Teddie, with the quite familiar feeling of a miscreant being called up for reproof.

"That assault was condoned, and, I am given to understand, was personally instigated and abetted by you, Miss Hayden," continued the enemy. "Mr. Uhlan is not only a gentleman of high social and professional standing, but is to-day one of the best-paid portrait-painters in America. Through the injuries which he sustained in this assault, I find, he is unable to execute a commission for the portrait of one of Pittsburgh's most prominent millionaires, before the latter sails for Europe. And through that, I regret to inform you, he has sustained a direct loss of exactly twelve thousand dollars."

A tempered sigh of relief escaped Teddie. She had expected something much worse, something much more difficult of adjustment.

"Well, if that's all that's worrying him," she remarked, "I'll be quite willing to make his loss good to him."

The aged attorney, as he sat massaging his bony knuckles, saw that the picking was good. So he could afford to become fatherly again.

"I may as well be frank with you, Miss Hayden, and make it clear from the outset that involved with this claim is one for a corresponding amount based on the personal injuries which Mr. Uhlan has received, injuries which, so far as medical science seems able to determine, give every promise of proving permanent. And there is a further claim of one thousand dollars for costs and medical services, which establishes the total claims at a round figure of twenty-five thousand dollars."

Teddie, who had sat watching him with rather solemn eyes, somewhat startled the sedate William Shotwell by a brief but scornful laugh.

"So that was rather an expensive thump on the nose, wasn't it?" she observed, with the last of her meekness taking wing. For it began to dawn on her, ignorant as she was of the meaning of money, just what they were trying to do to her.

"I am not prepared to disagree with you," admitted her enemy, not without acerbity.

"And did he tell you just what he was

doing when he got that thump on the nose?" demanded Teddie, with slowly rising indignation.

"He was doing nothing, apparently, which demanded his—his being maimed for life," the man of the law responded with dignity.

"He wasn't maimed for life," declared Teddie, with the last of her desolation gone, "but he got exactly what he deserved."

"That, of course, is a matter not for us but for the courts to decide," remarked William Shotwell, with a lugubrious shake of the head.

"Then what's the use of us talking about it now?" demanded Teddie, with a glance at her unfinished sketch of the Macauley Mission by Moonlight.

"It was merely to save you pain," remarked her benefactor as he rose from his chair.

"It seems rather an expensive anesthetic," observed Teddie, "at twenty-five thousand dollars a whiff!"

"Am I to understand, then, that you in-

tend to contest this claim?" demanded the man of law, taking up his hat.

Teddie swung about on him, with a little flush of anger on her magnolia-white cheeks. Then, for once in her life, discretion put a hand on the sleeve of impulse. About her rebellious young body she felt the phantasmal jaws of her Uncle Charlton's waffle-iron coming closer and closer together.

"I must decline to enter into any discussion of the matter until I have seen my attorney," she said with dignity. It was what was usually said, she remembered, at all such junctures.

"Then might I inquire just who your attorney is?" inquired William Shotwell.

And Teddie's dignity, for a moment, betrayed serious evidences of collapsing. She had no attorney. She didn't even know of any attorney. But she couldn't afford to betray her isolation.

"You will hear from him in due time," she said with what was plainly a valedictory smile, as she preceded her persecutor to the door.

But her persecutor exhibited no signs of taking his departure. Instead, he stepped closer, seeming to suffer some mysterious inward deliquescence as he studied her with a sympathetic if slightly watery eye.

"My dear girl," he softly intoned, with one hand stretched out in her direction, "as a friend of your family—and I trust I may regard myself as such—but more as a friend of your own, I am compelled to say that I think you are taking the wrong course in this. I know whereof I speak. You are too young, too innocent, too—er—too sweet, to be dragged without knowing what you have to face into the brutalities and humiliations of litigation like this. Indeed, my child, I think too much of you, of your——"

"Good afternoon," interrupted Teddie with that rising inflection which can make two innocent words so unmistakably dismissive. For Teddie was worried. For a moment or two, indeed, she felt terribly afraid that he was going to kiss her. And during the last day or so, she remembered,

there had been altogether too much of that sort of thing. "Good afternoon," she repeated with *frappéd* finality, as she opened the door and swung it wide, with her back against the wall.

She stood there, even after he had bowed himself pompously out, with a frown of perplexity on her smooth young brow and a weight on her troubled young heart. She felt like a harried front-liner whose supports have failed to come up. She felt like a thirty-footer being pounded by a big and brutal Atlantic. She felt like a hothouse orchid that had been blown out of a coupelet window and was being trampled on by all the heels and run over by all the wheels of Fifth Avenue.

She was awakened from that little reverie of self-pity by the repeated shrill of her telephone bell. So she crossed wearily to her desk and took up the receiver.

"This is Ruby Reamer speakin'," said the voice over its thread of metal, "and I guess I've got considerable speakin' to do with you."

"About what?" somewhat indifferently inquired Teddie.

"About my Gunnie," was the prompt and shrill-noted reply. "I want 'o know just what call you've got to come between Gunboat and me after we've been going together for a year and a half! I want 'o know what right, just b'cause you're rotten with money, you've got to turn a poor boy's head and have him say the things that Gunnie's just been sayin' to me! I want——"

"Ruby," interrupted Teddie, steadying herself, "you are saying things yourself that are utterly ridiculous. I haven't either the intention or the desire to come in any way whatever between you and the young gentleman you speak of as Gunnie. I——"

"Then just why were you usin' me, *me* of all people, to make a date with him not more than twenty-four hours ago?" demanded the irate voice over the wire. "And if there's nothin' to *that*, just why is he runnin' round in your car to-day?"

"In my car?" echoed Teddie.

"Yes, and bumpin' into a Fifth Avenue bus with it and havin' the ink sleuths from the canary-colored evenin' papers comin' and frightenin' his poor old mother into a nervous breakdown?"

It took a little time for Teddie to digest this.

"But, my dear girl," she finally explained, "your Gunnie has no more claim on that car of mine than he has on me."

"Well, he thinks he has. And he's so sure of it he's even been advertisin' that you know he has. And I've been goin' with Gunnie long enough to realize that that boy never told a lie in his life."

This declaration of faith in Gunboat Dorgan was followed by a moment or two of unbroken silence.

"Ruby," finally called out the bewildered girl at the telephone, "I want you to come here. I want to see you. I *must* see you at once."

"From the way things are breakin'," clearly and coldly announced the lady on the other end of the wire, "I don't think

it's me you want to see. You'd better do your talkin' to my lawyer!"

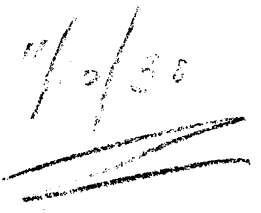
"Ruby!" called the girl at the desk.

But the wire brought no answer to that repeated call, and Teddie hung up the receiver. She placed it slowly and carefully on its hook and sat staring at the cadmium tinted wall, with a look of helpless protest on her bewildered young face. And for the second time she found herself face to face with a forlorn and seemingly fruitless survey of her resources.

Once or twice, in her desperation, she was even tempted to pack up and scurry off to Hot Springs in the wake of her Uncle Chandler. But that, she remembered, would be more than cowardly. It would be foolish, for it would be nothing more than a momentary evasion of the inevitable. And besides being a sacrifice of dignity, it would stand as an advertisement of guilt.

Then out of a world that seemed as cold and empty as a glacial moraine came one faint glow of hope. On the gray sky-line

of a Sahara of uncertainties appeared a tremulous palm-frond or two. For Teddie, in her misery, had suddenly taken thought of Gerald Rhindelander West. Gerry, she remembered with a gulp, was not only one of her own set, but also a corporation lawyer. It wouldn't be easy to explain things to Gerry. It would, in fact, involve sacrifices of pride which made her wince without knowing it. But she had talked about having an attorney. And it was her duty to find one.



CHAPTER NINE

WHEN Teddie made ready for her conference with Gerald Rhindelander West she did so with a particularity which might have surprised both her recently abandoned maid and the immediate members of her own family. She went forth to the *terra incognita* of Nassau Street cuirassed in tailored and braided trimness and gauntleted in spotless kid with just the right array of wrinkles about her glove-tops. She was still further entrenched behind a four-skin scarf of blue-fox—which wasn't blue at all—and a canteen muff to match, to say nothing of seven cyanitie-looking orchids which completed the color-scheme and fluttered demurely above her slightly fluttering heart.

For it wasn't often that Teddie was as excited as she found herself that morning,

just as it wasn't often that she had turned to give ponderable thought to the question of armor-plate. But it loomed up before her as a serious matter, this commandeering of a clever young attorney to her side of the case, and she felt the need of not producing an unfavorable impression on Gerry.

Yet even after she had unearthed Gerry's aerial office-suite in that seldom explored warren of industry known as Nassau Street, she found the attorney in question not quite so accessible as she had anticipated. For she was compelled to send in a card, and cool her heels in an outer room, and even after being admitted to the royal presence had to wait for a further minute or two while Gerry instructed an altogether unnecessarily attractive stenographer as to the procedure in manifolding a somewhat dignified array of documents.

He seemed still preoccupied, in fact, as he seated Teddie in a chair at his desk-end and absently took her muff and put it down and motioned away a secretarial-looking

intruder and crisply asked just what he could do for her.

Teddie found it hard to begin. She made two false starts, in fact, before she was able to begin. And then she refused to be further intimidated by the paraded professional dignity of a person who'd once helped her paint zebra-stripes on a Jersey cow.

"Gerry, do you know Raoul Uhlan?" she found herself quite casually inquiring.

Gerry pondered the question for a moment. He was really thinking, all the time, how extraordinarily lovely Teddie could look in blue-fox.

"He's a man whom I have the privilege of not knowing," was Gerry's retarded but none the less satisfactory reply. "Why do you ask?"

"Because he's suing me for twenty-five thousand dollars," was Teddie's altogether unexpected announcement. Gerry, however, seemed determined to remain immobile.

"Not for breach of promise?" he asked, with an air of diffidence.

"No; it's for what I suppose you'd call breach of the peace," explained his client.

"What did you do?" inquired Gerry, with vivid but secret memories of the Nero incident.

"I had his nose thumped," acknowledged Teddie with vigor.

"Why?" asked Gerry, wondering why his mind kept straying back to one-eyed Russian rats.

Teddie hesitated. It wasn't an easy thing to talk about. That was a lesson she had already learned. But Gerry was different. He was one of her own world and one of her own set, and he'd look at the thing in the right way, in the only way.

"Why?" he repeated, secretly astounded by this new mood of humility in which he found Teddie Hayden immersed.

"Because he tried to kiss me," acknowledged Teddie, meeting Gerry's unwavering gaze.

"Fine!" said Gerry, as cool as a cucumber. "But who did the thumping?"

"A prize-fighter by the name of Dorgan —Gunboat Dorgan."

"Better still," calmly agreed her interlocutor, "for that implies it was a genuine professional thumping."

"It was," conceded Teddie. She was more than serious, she was even grim about it all. And if Gerry West had laughed at her, at any moment of that perilous mood, everything would have been over between them.

But Gerry was solemnity itself. "Go on!" he said, almost bruskly.

"Now Raoul Uhlan claims that he's lost a valuable commission through—through what was done to him. And the young lady who's interested in Gunboat Dorgan seems to think because I had him protect me in this way that I've interfered with her claim on this hero of hers."

"In what way interfered with him?" demanded Gerry.

"That I've—that I've made love to him," acknowledged the none too happy Theodora Lydia.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because she's seeing her lawyer about it."

"And this man Uhlan?"

"He sent his attorney, a man named Shotwell, to my studio to explain that because of his injuries he couldn't paint his twelve-thousand-dollar portrait. I was quite willing to pay for that until old Shotwell put in another claim for twelve thousand dollars for damages in general and an extra thousand for himself."

"So they're all trying after a bite," commented Gerry, studying his engagement-pad. "Now, tell me, Miss Hayden——"

"Don't do that," was Teddie's sharp command.

"Don't do what?"

"Don't call me Miss Hayden."

"All right, Teddie," acquiesced her counsel-at-law, without a break in his solemnity. "But the first thing you must tell me is just what you intend doing."

"I don't know *what* to do. That's why I came to see you. That's what I'm willing to pay you for. But it's not entirely unnatural, I think, to nurse a fixed aversion to be chased around the map by an army of reporters and subpœna-servers."

"There are several things, of course, that we can do," explained Gerry, quite unruffled by this unmasking of the guns of irony. "But before we go any further there's a phase or two of the case I must understand. It was in your studio, you say, that this assault took place?"

"I *hate* that word!" interpolated Teddie.

"Well—er—this incident. Now, had you forbidden this man Uhlan entry, warned him away, and all that sort of thing?"

"No, he was coming there three times a week, to give me lessons," explained Teddie.

"For which he was being duly paid?"

"No, nothing was ever said about his being paid," she acknowledged. And Gerry's increase of gravity didn't altogether add to her happiness.

"And the day he got his thumping—why did he come to your studio on that occasion?"

For the second time Teddie hesitated. Life, after all, wasn't so simple as she had once imagined it.

"He came to make love to me," she finally admitted, not meeting Gerry's eyes. "And I had Gunboat Dorgan there to give him what he deserved."

Gerry wagged his head. He did so with what impressed Teddie as quite unnecessary solemnity.

"Now, about this man Dorgan: He knew exactly why he was doing what he did?"

"Of course!"

"And he expected to be duly paid for this—er—service he rendered you?" asked Gerry, seeming to persist in his determination that things should not be made too easy for her.

"No, he declined to have the matter of money come into it at all," Teddie rather falteringly acknowledged.

"Then what was the understanding?"

"There was no understanding."

"Then what did he do, when the thing was over?"

A silence fell between them.

"He kissed me," slowly acknowledged

truthful Teddie, flushing up to the tiptilted brim of her hat.

Gerry swung sharply about. He swung about and stared out of the skyscraper window.

"He had no reason, no excuse, for doing anything like that!" supplemented the tingling Teddie.

"Didn't he, now!" silently soliloquized Gerry as he swung slowly back in his swivel-chair and sat staring at her. Then he added, aloud: "And what happened after that?"

"He presumed on his privileges to the extent of taking my car out of the garage and going joy-riding in it."

"Without your knowledge and permission?"

"Entirely! And bumped into a street-bus and broke my lamps."

"That's much better," Gerry surprised her by saying.

"Why?" asked Teddie, vaguely disturbed by her remembered failure to mention an offhanded proffer of this same car

to this same knight with the cauliflower ear.

"Because we can settle *his* hash with a larceny action," retorted Gerry. "But our biggest nut to crack, I imagine, will be Uhlan!"

"What can we do about him?" asked Teddie, with the faintest trace of a tremor in her voice.

"There are quite a number of things we can do," coolly explained her solemn-eyed counsellor. "I can have him put out of the Camperdown Club, for one thing, before the week-end. I can demand an impartial appraisement of his physical injuries. I can see Shotwell, this attorney of his, and accept service. I can even get after 'em for blackmail. And there are several other things I can do. But each and every one of them will result in exactly the end we are most anxious to obviate. By that I mean publicity, newspaper talk, the reporters you spoke of as chasing you all over the map. That's the one thing, Teddie, we must not and shall not have!"

"No, we mustn't have that!" echoed Teddie, mysteriously comforted by the masterfulness of this new-found sage who could achieve such a cool-headed and clear-eyed view of the entire tangled-up muddle. It took a load off her mind, to know that she had some one so adroit and dependable as Gerry to stand beside her in this fight against the forces of evil. She felt sorry, in fact, that she hadn't come to Gerry in the first place. Then she felt rather glad in remembering that since she had come to him, she hadn't come looking like a frump.

"So the best thing you can do, Teddie," her new-found adviser was saying to her, "is to leave this entirely in my hands for a day or two. All I'm going to ask you to do is to keep mum, to sit tight. Before the week-end, I feel sure, we'll have the whole thing straightened out. And, by the way, what's the name and address of your prize-fighter's lady friend?"

He remained solemnity incarnate as he jotted Ruby Reamer's name and address down on his scratch-pad.

"Has it occurred to you," he said as he wrote, without looking up, "that this man Dorgan might have been the proper person for Uhlan to take action against?"

"I imagine he saw about all he wanted to of Dorgan," announced Teddie, with the icicle-look once more in her eyes.

"But not all he wanted to of *you?*" questioned Gerry, pretending to ignore her eye-flash of indignation. It was not often that he'd enjoyed the luxury of finding Teddie Hayden on the defensive, and he intended to make the most of it. "It's quite apparent he isn't afraid of *you!*"

"I was hoping you could make him that way," acknowledged Teddie. She said it quietly, but there was a barb in it which Gerry couldn't quite overlook.

"Well, we'll get him that way," he announced with vigor, as he rose to his feet. "If it's action they're after, they'll get all they want!"

A consciousness of clearing skies both elated and depressed the brooding-eyed Teddie. What Gerry was doing for her

was being done merely in the way of a professional duty for which he would be duly paid. But they had been friends once, and she had treated him, she remembered, rather rottenly of late. She wanted to say something about that, make some effort to explain it away, yet she didn't quite know how to get that belated mood of repentance into words.

So, as she rose from her chair, she didn't even try to put it into words. She merely smiled softly and gratefully up into Gerry's eyes as he stood beside her, with the magnolia-white of her cheeks tinging into pink as he stared back at her, with his jaw-muscles set and a quick look of pain on the face that still remained preoccupied.

"It's—it's awfully good of you, Gerry," she said as she held out her hand to him.

"That's how I make my living," was Gerry's unexpectedly brusk reply. But, apparently without knowing it, he still held her hand in his.

"It's awfully, awfully good of you," she

repeated, as she reached with her free hand to restore the scarf which had slipped off her shoulder.

"It's not a bit good of me," he countered, almost harshly, as he put the scarf back where it belonged. And she would have been afraid of him, with that sudden black look in his eyes, if she hadn't remembered that Gerald Rhindelander West was a gentleman, a man of her own world and her own way of looking at things. And she rather liked that touch of *camaraderie* which was expressing itself in the unconsidered big-brothery weight of his hand on her unaverted shoulder.

"I feel so—so safe with you," she reassured him, with that misty look in her upraised eyes which can seem so much like a sigh made visible. And it was beginning to be a luxury, she felt, to find somebody she could feel that way with.

"Well, you're not!" he said in a voice that was almost a bark.

"Why do you mean I'm not?" she asked, perplexed, with a still more searching study of his face.

"I mean because——"

He did not finish. Instead, with his hand still on her shoulder, he stooped and kissed her.

Teddie recoiled three full steps, and stood with her arms straight at her sides and a black rage in her startled eyes. Gerry's own hands had dropped to his side, and his head fell forward, for all the world like a chrysanthemum that needed watering.

"O-o-o-o-o-o!" gasped Teddie, with the most unmistakable accents of loathing and anger in her voice. "Are *all* men like that?"

"Wait!" called out Gerry, unhappily, pleadingly.

But Teddie had no intention of waiting. She withered him with one short look of revulsion, of utter repudiation, wheeled about, and strode out of the office.

She went, leaving behind her a blue-fox canteen muff and a much bluer young attorney who for quite a number of minutes stood staring morose and motionless out over the East River. He contemplated

that wharf-fringed waterway very much as though he should like to take a header down into it. Then, as he slowly and dejectedly turned about, his eye fell on the forgotten muff.

He crossed to his desk and took the furry pillow up in his hands, turning it over and over. He meditatively stroked the deep pelt, sniffed at it, started for the door, and just as suddenly stopped. Then he quietly removed two tennis racquets and a box of golf-balls wrapped in a llama-wool sweater-coat from the bottom drawer of his desk and into this same drawer carefully tucked away the blue-fox muff—after which he stood, irresolute and unmoving, for another full five minutes.

Then Gerry West, as though to make up for lost time, exploded into a sudden fury of movement. He punched the buzzer-button for his stenographer, jerked down the messenger-call lever and caught up the telephone directory with one hand while he possessed himself of the receiver with the other.

"I'll show 'em," he muttered darkly to himself, "I'll show 'em they can't pull that cave-man stuff around my home circle!"

And in half an hour's time he had an ex-pool-roomer from a private detective agency busily shadowing Gunboat Dorgan, and another quiet-moving agent gathering what data he could as to the physical disabilities of Raoul Uhlan, and an expeditious clerk from the outer office confirming the address and movements of a certain Miss Ruby Reamer. Then, having started these wheels into motion, he hurriedly looked up a point or two of law, consulted his watch, and called up Louis Lipsett, of *The Star,* at the Press Club.

"Louis," he said over the wire, "I've got a great news story for you."

"Good!" promptly announced the other.

"Yes, it's so good, in fact, that you've got to come and help me kill it in the bud."

"Then let me add that what you want isn't a reporter, but an undertaker," retorted the unfeeling young White Hope of his over-saffroned daily.

"No, I want you, Louis, and I want you as quick as you can come," Gerry coolly averred.

"But why *me?*"

"Because you're the only ink-coolie on this Island who'd keep your word if you once promised to. So come over here in a taxi and let me unload."

Louis came, and smoked Gerry's good cigars, and listened, and remembered his promise with a true inkster's pang of regret.

"Now, the one thing that Avenue-robin can't stand, the one thing he doesn't want, in all this, is printer's ink. So it's up to us to give him what he's afraid of. It's up to us to hold a full-page Sunday story over his fat head. I want you to go right up to him as a reporter from *The Star,* with every detail I've given you. I want you to let him see just what it'll look like when it's unrolled, the entire unsavory story. And if he isn't sending a hurry-call in for the soft pedal before you're out of the elevator I'll buy *The Star* and give it to you to play with when you've got writer's

cramp in the coco and can't dream up cable-despatches any more."

"And supposing our Romeo doesn't weaken?"

"He can't help it. But if he's crazy enough not to, I'll bring Gunboat Dorgan up there myself. And if that doesn't turn the trick, I'll call the rotter out myself and give 'im what he deserves. And if that doesn't work, I'll put a bullet into him!"

The man from *The Star* office smiled a bit wearily.

"Say, Gerry, doesn't this strike you as going pretty far for a mere client?"

"A mere client!" echoed the other. "A mere client?" he repeated as he looked his confederate straight in the eye. "She's a darned sight more than that. She's the girl, please God, that I'm going to marry!"

"So at last I get you," announced the solemn-eyed Louis as he reached over the desk-end and solemnly shook hands with the other man. "And now I'll know how to put the screws to that palette-scraper!"

"Then let's get busy," suggested Gerry as he reached for his hat and coat, after a

moment's talk over the wire. "They've got that Reamer girl for me, and the sooner we have our pow-wow the better!"

CHAPTER TEN

When Teddie left Gerald Rhindelander West's office she left behind her more than a blue-fox canteen muff. She left the last of her confidence in life, the last of her belief in mankind. She found herself compelled to face a world that seemed too big and brutal for even the valorous spirit of youth. And after a vast amount of frantic and quite fruitless thinking she also found herself compelled to eat crow. The current was too strong for her. It had tired her out, and baffled her, and broken down both her will-power and her pride. Much as she hated to do it, she felt that her only way out was to compromise with Raoul Uhlan. Right or wrong, she would pay the man's claim and get the thing over with.

A quick assessment of her immediate means, however, showed her that she had

little more than half enough money to meet his demand. So she promptly stopped in at the Waldorf telegraph desk and sent a message to her Uncle Chandler at Hot Springs.

"Please wire my banker," she said, "eleven thousand dollars without delay or foolish questions, as it is urgent. Lovingly, Teddie."

Her Uncle Chandler, after frowning for a full hour over this unexpected message, none too willingly wired instructions for eleven thousand dollars to be placed to the credit of his niece. Then, after still another hour of troubled thought, he sent a day-letter off to old Commodore Stillman at the Nasturtium Club explaining that he had reason to believe that Theodora was in some sort of trouble and requesting him to drop quietly down to the girl's studio and have a look around to see just what was wrong.

And the Commodore in question, instead of being upset by this calamitous intimation of beauty in distress, adjusted his cravat and stopped in at Thorley's for the

insertion of a Richmond rose-bud in the button-hole of his right-hand lapel. Then he toddled blithely down to the wilds of Greenwich Village, where he arrived at Teddie's studio just in time to see an urbane old gentleman pocket, with an air of quiet but unqualified satisfaction, a narrow slip of paper which looked remarkably like a bank-check. He stood aside, however, until this triumphant-eyed old gentleman had bowed himself triumphantly out, whereupon it came to his attention that his somewhat abstracted young hostess remained undeniably divorced from the customary buoyancies of youth.

He was so impressed, in fact, by the shadows of fatigue about Teddie's starry eyes and the world-weariness in her forlorn little smile that he concluded the gravest fears of his old friend the Major to be quite well founded. But Teddie, accepting him as an emissary from a world of pomp and order which seemed eternally lost to her, was glad enough to ensconce him in the brown-velvet armchair and make tea for him in the battered old samovar.

It was not particularly good tea, he soon discovered, but that in no way dampened his ardor or discouraged him in the object of his visitation. So he hummed and hawed, and touched lightly on the prerogatives of the elderly, and ventured the assertion that New York was an extremely bewildering city, especially for the young, and he became paternal and platitudinous over the perils of the wide, wide world in general, and then with rather awkward unconcern announced his hope that Teddie was making a go of it.

But Teddie wasn't making a go of it, as she very well knew, and for one weak moment she was tempted to take this kindly-eyed and clean-hearted old gentleman into her confidence and exteriorate her troubles by freely and frankly talking them over with one of her own kind. But a revival of her old spirit of independence nipped this impulse in the bud, so she merely gave the Commodore another cup of tea and somewhat pensively asked if the autumn ball at Tuxedo had been a success this year. Whereupon the old Commodore

admitted that it had been a success, if you could call such things a success. But they weren't like the good old days of the Patriarchs and the Assemblies and The Howling Swells. The spirit of the times had changed, had lamentably changed, and the relationship of the sexes in the younger generation seemed disturbing to the survivors of the older era when a lady was accepted as a lady and treated as one. And from this diatribe on the degeneration of the present day Teddie's counsellor glided easily and eloquently into the advantages, for the girl of to-day, of early marriage and adequate guardianship. Every girl of spirit ought to marry. Even Teddie herself, he finally ventured, ought to marry.

"No young whippersnapper, mind you," discreetly qualified the old Commodore, "but some older and steadier man who knows the world and its ways, a man to be relied on in times of trouble, a man who'd be a harbor of refuge when the seas got to kicking up a bit!"

But this didn't seem to impress Teddie as he had hoped it would.

"I've seen all I want to of men," she announced with unexpected passion. "I despise 'em, the whole pack of them!"

"And you don't intend to marry?" demanded the scion of the statelier years.

"Never!" retorted Teddie, staring fixedly at her unfinished sketch of the Macauley Mission by Moonlight.

"Then what, may I ask, do you intend doing?" inquired her stiff-shouldered old visitor.

She had intended to say that she wanted to live for Art. But she hesitated. For Art, at that particular juncture, seemed a very anemic and elusive thing to live for. She had no idea, in fact, just what she *did* intend living for. She was less impatient of others than she might once have been. She even recognized kindliness under the intentions of that over-personal emissary from her older world, however heavy-handed he may have been in his executions of those intentions. And that, impinging on her desolated young spirit, intrigued her into a brief but depressing mood of self-pity. There was no trace of tears in

her eyes, for Teddie was not habitually lachrymose. But before she found that mood conquered and killed she was unable to resist the temptation to let her bobbed head sink wearily into the crooked arm which rested on one end of the none-too-orderly cherrywood table.

"Oh, I say, you know; this sort of thing won't do!" ejaculated her obviously disturbed visitor. "It won't do, my dear," he repeated as he patted what was left of the bobbed hair with his fatherly old hand.

Teddie, however, was without the spirit either to agree or disagree with that statement. And her unhappiness so melted the heart of the benignant old Commodore that he took her hand and stroked it as he talked to her. And so gratified was he to see even the ghost of a grim little smile about her lips that a paternally commiserative impulse prompted him to stoop down and kiss the magnolia-white cheek.

So intent, indeed, had he been on his contemplation of this white cheek, faintly shot through with its shell-pink, that the door had opened and a third person had

stepped into the studio without his being conscious of the fact. And it was the voice of this intruder, more than Teddie's sudden recoil of startled wonder, that promptly brought the Commodore to attention.

"So *he's* doin' it too!" called out Gunboat Dorgan, with a quaver of incredulity in his Celtic young voice. Whereupon he threw down his hat and advanced slowly toward the table-end. "Say it quick," he commanded. "D' yuh want me to knock his block off?"

"No, no," cried Teddie, already on her feet. "There's been too much of that already!"

"But I saw the old bird tryin' to kiss yuh!" proclaimed the indignant youth.

"Who is this young jackanapes?" interrupted the older man, in no way intimidated by the interloper with the cauliflower ear.

"Didn't I see this old mutt pullin' that muggin'-stuff?" persisted Gunboat, ignoring the stately old gentleman with the rose-bud in his lapel. But Teddie was herself by this time and she fixed her cham-

pion from the East Side with a cold and steely stare.

"I want to talk to you!" she said, with great deliberation. And she made that announcement with such an unlooked-for note of masterfulness that, unimpressed as it left the newcomer, it rather bewildered the old Commodore.

"And I guess I gotta earful or two to unload to yuh!" countered Gunboat, betraying that he was laboring under an excitement which more recent events had only temporarily eclipsed.

"I should be obliged to know just who this young bounder is," repeated the older man, in his most authoritative quarter-deck manner. But that manner was entirely lost on Gunboat Dorgan.

"Yuh just play dead, yuh old Has-Been, until I say a word or two to me lady-friend here," he proclaimed as he confronted Teddie and gave his back to an all too negligible enemy. "I came here to find out what right a law-sharp named West has got to take that car of yours away from me. I wantta know what call he's got to

load Ruby up wit' a lot o' talk about me goin' to State's Prison. And I may be a prize-fighter, but I've got the right to ask if I ain't lived decent and done my work on the square. I've got——"

"A prize-fighter?" interrupted the older man in the background. Then he strode valorously in between the two. "Do you mean to tell me, Miss Hayden, that a girl of your antecedents has—has come to have dealings with——"

But he in turn was destined to interruption.

"Say, d' yuh want me to throw this old cuff-shooter out o' here?" was Gunboat Dorgan's crisp and angry demand of the girl.

"Stop it!" cried Teddie, with a stamp of the foot. "Stop it, right here and right now! I'm tired of all this. I'm so tired of it I can't stand another moment of it!" Then, with a deep breath, she turned about to the old gentleman with the rose-bud in his button-hole. "It's been very kind of you, I'm sure," she said in a voice of laboriously achieved patience, "but you

can't possibly help me, and you can't possibly do any good by remaining here. So if you'll permit Mr. Dorgan and me to talk this quietly over, by ourselves——"

"You are requesting me to leave you?" her would-be benefactor inquired, as he reached for his hat.

"You must," announced Teddie.

"Then permit me, Miss Hayden," said the other with dignity, "to bid not only you, but also your—your professional boxer, a good afternoon."

And the old Commodore buttoned his coat and took his departure. He sallied forth with considerable trepidation, trepidation which remained with him even until he stopped in at a telegraph-office on lower Fifth Avenue and despatched a none too carefully worded message to the old Major in Hot Springs, announcing that things looked very dark indeed, as Theodora seemed to be mixed up with a young prize-fighter by the name of Dorgan, and suggesting that the sooner Theodora's uncle could get back to the city the better it might be for all concerned.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TEDDIE, alone with her irate young prize-fighter, turned and regarded him with a studiously narrowed eye.

"Now, what do you want to know?" she quietly demanded. She felt oddly and immeasurably older than she had done but one short week ago.

"I want 'o know who's playin' double in this mix-up," Gunboat Dorgan promptly asserted.

"I don't quite understand," protested Teddie.

"Well, first thing, I want 'o know just what yuh said about that car?"

"When?" temporized Teddie. "And where?"

"Just b'fore I kissed yuh, right here in this room," asserted the over-honest

youth. Whereupon Teddie stiffened and winced and had to take a grip on herself before she could control her voice.

"I'm sorry there's been any mistake about it," explained Teddie, doing her best to be patient. "I remember now, I said you could have the car. And, as a matter of fact, you are perfectly welcome to it, or what's left of it!"

"Then why's this man West talkin' so big about grand larceny and gettin' me locked up? What's he know about what's been passin' strictly b'tween yuh and me? Yuh were up ag'inst it, and I could see it, and I helped yuh out the same as I'd help any girl. And I didn't have me hand out when I did it!"

"That was the trouble, Mr. Dorgan," Teddie tried to tell him. "I was willing to accept service from you without stopping to consider whether or not it could be repaid, I mean adequately repaid. And that's where I made my mistake. You'll have to attribute that mistake, I'm afraid, to the defects in my bringing up. It's a sort of penalty for the past. One gets into

the habit of accepting things, just as one accepts cinnamon-toast from the footman, or a trip across the Hudson from the ferry-boat, without being actively conscious of any human obligation. That man had made himself unbearably offensive to me, and I asked you to punch his nose for me, without remembering the risks it involved, without appreciating the danger I was bringing——"

"Risks!" cried Gunboat, with a derisive hoot, finally arriving at a definite idea in what seemed a morass of abstractions. "Where's the risks in standin' up to a big stiff like that?"

"I'm afraid I wasn't thinking of the risks to you," Teddie rather wearily explained. "I was rather selfishly remembering the risks to myself."

"Well, yuh ain't suffered none from it, have yuh?" derided her still indignant-eyed cross-examiner.

"I've just paid Raoul Uhlan twenty-five thousand dollars as compensation for his injuries," explained Teddie, as coolly as she was able.

Gunboat Dorgan fell back, gaped a little, and then swallowed hard.

"Yuh paid—yuh paid that mutt— that money—for—for what he'd get tarred and feathered for—down in my Ward!" he gasped, wide-eyed with incredulity.

Teddie nodded.

And Gunboat, seeing that movement of acquiescence, repeated: "Twenty-five thousand dollars!" Then he began to stride meditatively back and forth, pacing the studio-rug with his characteristic panther-like step. Teddie watched him, without speaking, without moving. She watched him until he came to an abrupt stop.

"Say, Ruby was right in this, after all," he suddenly proclaimed. "*I* was the guy who got off his trolley. Yuh—yuh looked so good to me I got my numbers mixed. I got to dreamin' things. But twenty-five thousand bucks in cold cash ain't no dream. And d' yuh know what I'm goin' to do, and do right now? I'm goin' up to that Uhlan guy and get that twenty-five thousand back. Just so 's yuh can see I'm a little more on the level than yuh've been

imaginin'. I'm goin' to make that studio-lizard come across wit' that dough—*with* that dough," he amended, remembering, in his excitement, certain old-time admonitions as to the utterance of his mother-tongue.

"But I don't want you to do that!" cried Teddie, harboring a strangely muddled up and reluctant admiration for the deluded young fire-eater with the Saint Anthony light in his blazing blue eyes.

"Of course yuh don't, for the thing's got yuh buffaloed the same as *yuh* got me buffaloed," proclaimed the knight of the ring. "And the whole lay-out's wrong. The only thing that got hurt about that guy was his dignity. I knew what I was doin' all the time. I held back on the sleep-punch, and played wit' him. I didn't give him anything that a pound of beefsteak wouldn't put right inside o' twenty-four hours—and he knows it as well as I do. But now he's pulled this blackmail stuff I'm goin' to put him wise to how I was toyin' wit' him. I'm goin' to let him see that if he ever so much as opens his trap about this business

he's goin' to have it decorated wit' a double set o' plates when I get through wit' him—when I get through *with* him. And the next time he'll holler so loud for help they'll be fannin' him wit' a hearse-plume before he's finished!"

Teddie tried to stop him as he turned away.

"Noth-thing doin'!" he proclaimed with his movie-hero side-movement of the hand. "I'm Irish, I am, and me Irish is up. Yuh're goin' to see this goob bitin' on a mouth-gag or yuh're goin' to see crape swingin' over his door-mat!"

"It's no use," Teddie still tried to tell him. "It's too late. It will only make things much worse than they already are!"

But Gunboat Dorgan hadn't been crowned with that soubriquet of belligerency without fit and proper reason.

"I'm wise to this lay-out now," he announced from the doorway, "and I'm goin' to have a hand in windin' it up. It's no use tryin' to flag me off. And I ain't sayin' yuh're a quitter, for yuh're only a girl. But yuh don't see me layin' down in the

shafts wit' a thing like this under me nose. I'm goin' through wit' this, and nobody's goin' to stop me. And maybe this'll square up a little for—for them lamps o' yours I put on the blink!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

TEDDIE, once she was alone in her studio, experienced a sense of confinement, a feeling of compression, which had hitherto been absent from her newer mode of life. She felt the need for untrammelled movement through fresh air, the craving to get out into open spaces and leave the suffocation of city walls behind her. She promptly decided, in fact, to drive her car out to Tuxedo, and even went to the telephone to order it from the garage. Then she remembered that she no longer had a car.

But this, in the face of the denudations with which life had been confronting her, did not impress her as a very vast deprivation. She merely called for another number and ordered a taxi, contenting herself with the thought of three gasoline-flavored hours in that *rus in urbe* known as Central Park.

But Teddie did not go gloom-riding in Central Park. For when she opened the door to what she thought to be a taxi-driver she found Gerry West there with his hat in his hand and a look of triumph in his eyes.

"Well, I've got it back," he announced, only momentarily abashed by the iciness of her manner.

"Got what back?" asked Teddie, without so much as asking him to step inside.

"Your car," explained Gerry, entering the abode of art on his own hook. "It's down at the door. And I had 'em put on a new pair of lamps on the way over."

"I'm sure that was very kind of you," Teddie coldly admitted. But her attitude was something more than unbending. It was distinctly hostile. For there were certain things which she wasn't quite able to forget.

"Say, Teddie," demanded her quick-eyed visitor, entirely ignoring her expression in his comprehensive stare about the studio, "what in the name of heaven are you doing in a dump like this?"

"It seems to have proved an entirely satisfactory place to me," Teddie responded with the utmost dignity.

"But has it?" demanded Gerry, putting down his hat.

"It would, if I were left alone," said Teddie, biting her lips.

"And what would that mean? What would that bring you?" asked Gerry, with a suddenly sobered face.

"It would bring me the freedom I want," retorted Teddie, with a challenge still in her gaze.

"That is the one thing it could never do, O Helen of the Ruinous Face!" corrected Gerry. But Teddie, who was in no sense a classical student, saw nothing remarkably appropriate in this allusion to the ancients.

"What makes you think that?" she asked, with a tremor in her voice. She hadn't intended any retreat from her earlier severity of tone. She prided herself on not being the sort of girl who would willingly show the white feather. But Gerry had touched on something which had

been bewildering her, of late, more than she was ready to acknowledge.

"The things that have been happening around here," he had the brutality to retort, "the things I'm now trying to straighten out for you!"

And remembering those things, the sense of her desolation returned to her double-fold. She walked to the window, looked out, and then turned slowly about. She was neither obtuse nor unsympathetic; she was merely a girl who had been prodigiously preoccupied with her fight for freedom and the depressing discovery that it was a losing fight.

"Oh, Gerry, what's the matter with me, anyway?" she demanded with an altogether unlooked-for note of wistfulness in her voice.

"Don't you know?" he said as he followed her to the window. "Don't you know, you poor little muddle-headed kid?"

Teddie shook her head. She was rather foolishly afraid that Gerry was going to be sympathetic, and she didn't want that,

for sympathy, of late, seemed the inevitable overture to the unmusical opera of mushiness.

"I'll tell you what's the matter with you, Teddie," asserted Gerry, wondering why she was refusing to meet his gaze. "You're inflammatory without quite knowing it. You're provocative, without being foolish enough to have fathomed the fact. The Lord made you so lovely, girl, that you put an ache in men's hearts and a mist in front of their eyes. You make them forget themselves. And that's why I've got to take you in hand."

"Take me in hand?" repeated Teddie, standing up very straight and white.

"Yes, take you in hand," repeated Gerry in turn.

"I rather think I've something to say about that!"

"Teddie, I've loved you all my life," said Gerry, quite simply, disregarding even the abysmal scorn in her voice.

"Then this is no time to tell me a thing like that," she retorted with spirit.

"And you're wrong there," contended Gerry, quite unmoved. "It's the only, the essential time."

"What makes you feel that way about it?" asked Teddie, disturbed by the darkening light in his eye.

"Because heaven only knows how long we can be alone here," was his not altogether satisfactory reply.

"I fail to see any particular advantage arising out of our—our temporary isolation," retorted Teddie, with quite unexpected Johnsonian dignity.

"Teddie!" was Gerry's sharp cry as he towered over her. "Don't you understand?"

"Understand what?" asked the girl with the exasperatingly level gaze as she surveyed the none too steady hands which he was holding out toward her.

"That I can't help kissing you!" he abandonedly exclaimed as he just as abandonedly proceeded to do so.

Teddie drew slowly away from him. He had seen children draw back, that way,

from a milk-snake coiled up in a chocolate-box. Her eyes were blazing.

"Now I know you're no better than——"

But that was as far as Teddie got. For the door was flung open and a protesting and much dishevelled Louis Lipsett was piloted into the room. He was piloted in without ceremony, and by the lapel of his overcoat. The hand that grasped that collar was Gunboat Dorgan's, and the lines of his wide mouth were grim with determination.

"Call off this wildcat," gasped Louis as he dropped weakly into a chair. "Call him or I'll get a shooting-iron and kill him!"

Gerry tried to remove the steel-corded hand from the uptwisted coat-collar, but Gunboat Dorgan betrayed no slightest intention of relaxing his hold.

"Not on your life," he irately announced. "Not until he eats every word of it!"

"Of what?" demanded Gerry, with an abstracted and mildly perplexed inspection of Louis Lipsett's person.

"Don't listen to him," cried the prisoner. "He's gone crazy. He's gummed up the whole game. He came tearing into Uhlan's studio when I had the big bounder scared stiff, had him eating out of my hand and willing to sign any kind of quit-claim I was ready to hand out. He blew in there ready to eat Uhlan up, until he found out I was from *The Star* and heard that tricky brush-tickler swear his lips were sealed and then step from under by saying it was me and my paper that were going to open up on a full-page story. *Me,* mind you, with all I'd done! Then this East Side rat-terrier let loose, and wouldn't even give me a chance to get to a phone and have you put things straight or call up our sporting-editor to shoot a little reason into his empty nut. He's hauled me around like a civet-bag and dragged me down here across eleven city blocks to say what you very well know I don't even need to say. And I call this a fine line of reporting, this ghost-laying for a bunch of love-sick idiots who're so afraid

of printer's ink they're playing tennis with bank-checks over it. For I'm not the only thing he's collared, I want y' to understand. He collared old Shotwell as well and shook that twenty-five-thousand-dollar draft out of him and has got it right here in his jeans while he's joy-riding on the back of my neck! But I'm tired of being bullyragged and manhandled and having my clothes spoilt, and if this rising star of suburban ring doesn't get his fingers out of my back hair inside of ten seconds I'm going to let loose with something more than ink before the day is over."

"Let him go!" commanded Gerry, in his most authoritative grand-jury voice. "This man is acting for Miss Hayden, is very generously and unselfishly acting for Miss Hayden."

"Am I now?" gritted Louis Lipsett, breathing hard and writhing his disordered clothing back into place.

"Well, so am I," averred Gunboat Dorgan as he tossed Teddie's much crumpled check out on the cherrywood table. "And

I want 'o know," he continued as he confronted Gerry West, "just what call yuh've got for buttin' in on this?"

"I am acting for Miss Hayden," Gerry announced with gravity.

"We're *all* acting for Miss Hayden!" mocked Louis, with a foolish upward movement of his hands. But Gunboat ignored that derisive interruption.

"In what way 're yuh actin' for her?" he demanded, with his shoulders squared and his chin out.

"As her husband," said Gerry with a grimness which was quite new to him.

Gunboat swung slowly about and stared at the girl on the other side of the cherry-wood table. He saw a slow flush creep up into the shell pink of her cheeks.

"Are yuh married to this mucker?" he demanded, with a thumb-jerk toward the unobserving Gerald Rhindelander West. And he swallowed hard as he put the question, just as Teddie used to swallow hard when she beheld the castor-oil bottle being lifted down out of the medicine cabinet.

"I am not!" was Teddie's quiet but distinct-noted reply.

"Are yuh goin' to be?" queried the narrow-eyed Gunboat.

"I am not going to be," replied Teddie, with an opaque eye on a slightly crestfallen young attorney.

Gunboat shook his cauliflower ear in a little nod of comprehension. Then he turned back to the girl.

"All right, then. I'm takin' care of yuh. Remember that. We'll cut out the hot-air artists and get busy. And that brings us round to this newspaper boob. He's got the whole story of what's been happenin' here, and he's talkin' big about puttin' it into print. I heard him wit' my own——"

"He won't put it into print," interrupted Gerry.

"What'll stop him?" demanded the man of battle.

"The knowledge of what we'd both do to him if he tried it," announced the expounder of law, doing his best to overlook Gunboat's oblique glance of contempt.

"And the further knowledge that he never even intended to put it into print."

"No, putting things into print doesn't seem to be my business any more," interpolated the morose-eyed Lipsett.

"Then why——" began Gunboat, but he was interrupted by the trill of the telephone bell. It was Teddie who finally crossed to the instrument and answered the call.

"It's for you, Mr. Dorgan," she said, without emotion, as she waited with the receiver in her hand.

"Oh, is that yuh, Ruby," Gunboat was murmuring a moment later, into the transmitter. He spoke in a strangely altered tone, a tone with even a touch of meekness in it. "All right, Ruby," he docilely agreed after several minutes of an obviously one-sided conversation. "Sure, Ruby, yuh're dead right." Then came the receiver's turn again, with an amending "Whatever yuh say, Ruby," gently intoned into the transmitter.

If Teddie garnered any inkling of that

capitulating meekness on Gunboat Dorgan's part, she gave out no echo of it in her own icy stare of disapproval as she stood regarding Gerald Rhindelander West. Even the rueful Louis Lipsett awakened to that oddly sustained duel of glances between the two silent figures on the far side of the room. He awakened, in fact, to the all-pervading, three-cornered preoccupation which surrounded him. And he made hay while the sun shone. He took advantage of that momentary inattention and slipped from his chair. He tiptoed discreetly out of the room and hurried away into the comparative quietness of Fourth Street, where he caught a Broadway surface-car and headed for the peace of Park Row.

Gunboat Dorgan, as he meditatively hung up the receiver, did not even miss the vanished newspaper man. He was too busy watching the strange couple still confronting each other on the far side of the studio. The girl, with ice-cold deliberation, pinned a tiptilted turban on her head, ad-

justed a four-piece blue-fox throw about her shoulders, and drew on a pair of wrinkled-topped gloves.

"Where are you going?" demanded the dark-browed expounder of the law, in a tone savoring unmistakably of the cave-man age.

"I regard that as entirely my own affair," retorted the girl in blue-fox, just as unmistakably reverting to the age of ice.

"Where are you going?" repeated the neolithic young giant in tweeds.

"Will you kindly permit me to open my own door?" said Teddie, with her chin up.

"Where are you going?" demanded Gerry, for the third and last time.

For one long moment of silence Teddie inspected him as though he were something under plate-glass, something behind Zoo bars.

"I'm going home!" she finally told him.

"Why?" exacted her altogether too obtuse tormentor.

"Because I'm tired of all this!" was the intense but low-noted reply.

"Of all what?" demanded the bewildered Gerry.

"Of seeing everything that's most sacred in life mauled over in public—of being mauled over myself as though I was something marked down on a bargain-counter—of finding out that all men are so—so disgusting and degradingly alike!"

It seemed to take time for Gerry to digest this. And even with time the process appeared to be unattended by any great degree of satisfaction.

"Haven't I been doing what I could for you?" he demanded, with the air of a man who asked only for reason.

"Are you worrying about your fee?" countered the pale-cheeked Teddie.

"I don't want a fee," said Gerry.

"Then what is it you want?"

Gerry tried to square his shoulders.

"I want *you!*"

She met his eye, but it took an effort. And Gerry, for the life of him, couldn't help thinking once more of the milk-snake in the chocolate-box.

"How about my wishes in the matter?" she asked with a slow and pointed emphasis which brought a wince to even Gunboat Dorgan's Celtic eyes.

"Just a minute, yuh folks," suggested the perturbed man of the ring. "This actin' as though yuh was married for ten years ain't goin' to bury any tomahawks and end the war-dance! There's been too much pullin' at cross——"

But it was Gunboat's turn to be interrupted. That final interruption came in the form of the unceremonious flinging back of the studio-door, disclosing the bristling but the immaculate figure of Teddie's Uncle Chandler.

"What's wrong here, Teddie?" demanded that perplexed-eyed old gentleman, striding into the room with all the dignity his sciatica would permit.

"She wants to go home," said Gerry. And as he said those five words in a singularly dull tone his hands went down to his sides. The movement, in some way, was oddly suggestive of flying colors forlornly lowered.

"Well, that impresses me as an eminently sane and respectable place to want to go to," remarked the old Major as he blinked from one to the other of the odd trio confronting him. But his eye, for some reason, was on Gerald Rhindelander West when he spoke next, though his question, obviously, was addressed to Teddie. "And just when do you want to go, my dear?"

"As soon as you can get me away from here," was Teddie's prompt but low-noted reply.

Ceremoniously the old Major held out his crooked right arm and dolorously the girl in the blue-fox took it. Neither of them spoke until they came to a stop beside the wine-colored shopping-car.

"I never intend to speak to Gerry West again as long as I live," announced Teddie, with a combined suddenness and fierceness which made her Uncle Chandler forget his left hip-joint as he climbed into the car beside her.

He patted her knee, comprehendingly.

"Under the circumstances, then," he

observed as she made the motor whine with an altogether unnecessary jab on the accelerator, "it'll be just as well, Teddikins, if you don't see him for a week or two!" . . .

Back in the dismal emptiness of the dismal gray studio Gerry and Gunboat stood looking at each other. Then Gunboat sighed fraternally and essayed an owl-like wag of the head.

"They're all alike, them women!" he remarked with the sagacity of one who has survived many unfair ordeals at the hands of the fair.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TEDDIE'S head was much clearer by the time she had motored out to Tuxedo. Her head was clearer, but the contradictory tides of feeling that eddied about her troubled young heart seemed as muddled up as ever. Even her Uncle Chandler was not entirely oblivious of the fact that some newer ferment was working in the depths of that bottled-up young soul. But he asked no questions. There were two things which he knew too well for that: one was life in general, and the other was Theodora Lydia Lorillard Hayden in particular.

As for Teddie herself, she was tyrannical and melting and snappy and chummy all at the same time. She promptly ordered the servants back at their posts, and just as promptly proceeded to bully them in a manner which plainly betokened that she intended to be master of her fate

in at least one quarter of an otherwise unconquered world. She ordered silver unpacked and moth-bags banished and the striped ticking off the furniture and the cars overhauled and the drapes restored and the drive-borders retrimmed and an absurd amount of cut flowers for every room in the house. But she prowled moodily about that house, resenting its quietness at the same time that she gave orders she was at home to nobody. She tried riding before breakfast, and found her old mount gone soft and her new groom grown sulky. She tried reading, and discovered how unbelievably dull all modern books could be. She tried motoring, and found no interest in maneuvering the old hair-pin curves on two wheels and no thrill in defying the old speed-traps at sixty miles an hour. Even the greenhouses, when she invaded them, seemed to suggest funeral set-pieces and the vanity of all earthly ways. The very walls about that lordly Hayden demense grew still again remarkably suggestive of jail walls. And that particular wall which intervened between her own and

the adjacent West estate seemed to take on a particularly objectionable coloring.

As for her Uncle Chandler, he punctiliously dressed for dinner, and punctiliously sat at one end of the big dining-room table while Teddie just as solemnly sat at the other—though she did once emerge sufficiently from her self-absorption to remark that they looked exactly like two palm-trees on the edge of the Sahara. She also once ventured to ask if Watkins really oughtn't to have a passport when he carried the joint all the way from her end of the table down to the old Major's end of the table. And her Uncle Chandler brightened up sufficiently to inquire if he hadn't better order a taxi to run them out to the terrace for coffee, so abysmally vast seemed the distances in that dolorous and empty house.

If the old Major remained suspiciously meek and long-suffering during these days of trial, it must be acknowledged that he made divers and undivulged trips in to the City, whence he returned oddly fortified in spirit and beguilingly abstracted in man-

ner. The only excursion which brought him obvious displeasure was that when he brought back to Teddie a motor-truck loaded down with her studio possessions—which the lady in question solemnly committed to a bonfire on the rear end of the East Drive. And that afternoon as they sat taking tea and cinnamon-toast on the Terrace, he finally found the courage to confront the morose-eyed young lady who sat in the high-backed willow-chair so moodily tearing an Ophelia rose to pieces.

"Say, Teddie, isn't it about time you were loosening up?" the old Major quietly inquired.

"About what?" demanded Teddie, taking her third slice of cinnamon-toast.

"About that mix-up down in the Village."

"It wasn't a mix-up," corrected Teddie.

"Then what was it?"

"It was a revelation!"

"A revelation of what?" asked Uncle Chandler as he put his teacup down.

"Of what men are!" asserted the abstracted-eyed Teddie.

"Of course," said the old Major as he took out a chased gold case and meditatively extracted a cigarette. "So let's have it, Teddikins, hook, line and sinker!"

But Teddie shook her head.

"I telegraphed to father," she inapposite remarked.

"Where *is* Trummie this summer?" her uncle inquired.

"He's still at the Arizona Camp Observatory," explained Teddie.

"Trummie moves so slowly," complained the old Major. "The poor man can't help it, I suppose, trailing that chain of D. S.'s, and F. R. S.'s and F. R. G. S.'s around after him all the time. But I suppose you felt he was the proper person to talk such things over with?"

Teddie nodded a slightly abstracted assent.

"Yes, I felt that way. But I had a wire from father this morning. He says he'll be through with his spectographic analysis of the Milky Way nebulæ before the end of October and that as soon as he feels sure he can synthesize an isotope of hydro-

gen approximating to nebulum he'll come east and have a talk with me!"

The old Major smiled pensively.

"Yes, I remember what he said when the Rubber Trust swallowed up my little Congolo Company and squeezed me out after I'd squeezed out the original Amsterdammers: 'The oysters eat the diatoms, and we eat the oysters!' It makes me wish, Teddie, that I could be a philosopher now and then."

"I wish women could be," remarked Teddie.

"Then why not make a stab at it," ventured the old gentleman who had been so intently studying her averted face, "by telling me what the trouble is?"

"There's really nothing to tell, Uncle Chandler," solemnly asserted the young lady with the moody eyes, drawing the striped ticking of reticence over the brocaded injustices of youth.

The old Major tossed away his cigarette. He sat staring at the poor little rich girl in the willow lawn-chair. He stared at her so long and so intently that she finally

turned about and looked none too fraternally into his face.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

"It's queer I never noticed it before," remarked the old Major, apparently more to himself than to the girl confronting him.

"Noticed what?" asked Teddie.

"How you're getting a bit like your mater," replied the placid-eyed old gentleman in the armchair, "a bit tamed and trimmed off and ironed out!"

"*I won't be!*" proclaimed Teddie, with quite unlooked-for passion, as she got up from her chair.

"But how, my dear, are you going to stop it?" asked the still equable old Major.

"I won't get like that!" reiterated Teddie, looking for all the world like a second Artemisia confronting an army of embattled males. She stood there, as though expecting some retort from him. But he said nothing. He merely took out another cigarette, lighted it, and recovered his morning *Herald* from the grass at his feet. This he proceeded to peruse with

studied unconcern, quite ignoring the young Artemisia still glowering at him over the edge of it. Then he looked up, with the ghost of a yawn.

"By the way, I saw the Commodore in town yesterday," observed Teddie's uncle as he leisurely turned a page. "He was telling me a queer thing about young West."

"Indeed!" said Teddie, without moving.

"The Commodore was saying that Gerry's going to marry that Rivers girl," offhandedly announced the maculated old scoundrel in immaculate cricketer's flannel.

He waited behind his paper, for several seconds. Then he heard a mirthless little laugh. Then he heard the contemptuous ejaculation of *"That frump!"* And then he heard quick steps along the marble walk that bisected the Terrace.

"Where are you going?" he demanded as he looked up to see Teddie making off with the stride of a Diana.

But Teddie entirely ignored that question. Instead of answering that not unnatural interrogation she was calling

sharply out to Watkins: "Tell Parrish I want my car. I want it *at once!*" And two minutes later, as the old Major folded up his paper and watched Teddie vanish down the West Drive leaving a scurry of gravel and a residuary cloud of dust above the shrubbery, he sighed audibly, and took out another cigarette, and sat deep in thought.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TEDDIE, as she swung into the open road and headed for the blue hills of Forgetfulness, which receded as she approached them, remembered that she was at least mistress of that ever-responsive piece of machinery on which she sat poised like a stormy petrel on the crest of a comber. It was hers to hasten and retard, to control and direct, as she wished. It was hers to curb into submission and harry into dust-trailing violation of the state road-laws. And as she went careening along the open highway, crouched frowningly over her mahogany wheel, she sought to ease the tumult in her perplexed young body by drinking up distance very much as disheartened men drink alcohol. She did her best to drug herself with speed, letting the air whip through the opened wind-shield

and sting her clouded and untalcumed young face.

When she caught sight of Luddy O'Brien, the traffic cop at the Valley Crossing, she dropped an eye to her speedometer and automatically slowed down. Quite automatically, too, she accosted that officer, after the long-established manner so disapproved of by her family, by raising her left hand to the level of her ear, holding the palm outward, and wigwagging her bunched fingers nervously up and down, very much as if she were twanging the strings of an invisible Irish harp.

Luddy grinned briefly but fraternally, saluted, and declined to commit himself, as an officer of the law, by turning to observe her as she swept past him and mounted the next hill—at a rate, be it recorded, not strictly in accordance with traffic regulations.

Teddie, in fact, was already discovering how brief and deluding can be the sense of release born of four flying wheels with nowhere in particular to fly to. She almost wished that she might hear the *put-put* of

Luddy's motorcycle as it rode her down. She almost wished that Luddy would arrest her and have her committed to a jail-yard with high walls where she couldn't possibly get out and where she could spend what remained of her blighted life breaking limestone rocks with a big hammer, breaking them by thumping them until they went to pieces, the same as she'd like to thump a few heads!

Then her thoughts went back to her car. From the crest of the hill which it had mounted like a swallow, Teddie could see the familiar gray ribbon of the road where it twined through the woodlanded valley below her. It was a very inviting road. It was more than inviting, in Teddie's present mood—it was challenging. And she breathed deeper as she saw that she couldn't even afford to keep an eye on her speedometer dial.

She was more than half-way down the long slope when she first caught sight of the motor-truck loaded with a double tier of cement blocks. That failed to trouble her, however, for she had ample room to

slither by. What troubled her, for a moment, was something coming down the opposing slope. It was a pigeon-gray roadster stripped of its top, a homely and heavy-bodied roadster which trailed rolling *cumuli* of road-dust in its wake. Her quick eye told her that as the different factors now revealed themselves the pigeon-gray roadster would pass the motor-truck before she could. This meant that she would have to give way and slow down and humbly wait for the autocrat piloting the pigeon-gray roadster. And this Teddie had neither the desire nor the intention of doing. For she knew who owned that roadster. She knew it even before she saw the bareheaded driver alone in the high-backed seat, the tanned and goggled face with the oil-stained old putty-colored motor-coat buttoned close up under the bony young Cæsar-Augustus chin. It was Gerry West's car. And Gerry West was in it, imperially demanding his right-of-way as he pounded man-like down a road which he regarded as entirely and altogether his own. But it was not Teddie's intention,

that afternoon, to play second fiddle to any one.

Her heart tightened a little, for she knew it would take promptness to swing out to the left and back to the right again before the lordly roadster pounded opposite the motor-lorry. If he had to slow up, at the last moment, so much the better, for he seemed, at the moment, to stand typical of those steam-rollers of life which she had always so actively resented. It was a bigger car than hers, a distinctly male car, and as such it owed her consideration. The burden of courtesy naturally must rest upon it.

Subliminally her practised eye was measuring the distances, appraising the speed of the rival car, evaluating the advance of the motor-truck. Her hand-palm punched the horn at the same time that her shoe-sole pushed down on the accelerator. Then she careened ahead, claiming her fairway by right of conquest. She punched the horn again, for the dust was troubling her more than she had expected. She swung out to the left to clear the

thundering motor-truck, rocked up to it, was abreast of it, and saw the pigeon-gray roadster opposing her, dancing down on her, with no visible decrease of speed.

He was not giving way an inch—and she knew what it meant. The truck still hemmed her in on the right, cluttering brisky forward, imperturbable and indifferent. It was too late to swing ahead and over; it was too late to slow down and drop back. Gerald Rhindelander West was refusing to give in to her!

But Gerry, at that moment, must have seen her. He must have seen her for the first time, just as he saw for the first time what was going to happen if they thundered together. And he gave way.

He gave way in the only manner possible, by throwing over his wheel and taking the ditch. There was a thump and scrape of mud-guards, a shout from the startled truck-driver, and an involuntary soprano scream from Teddie as she stiffened at her wheel and with a grinding of rubber and gravel brought her car to a stop.

When she looked back, with her heart in

her mouth, she saw no sign of a roadster and no sign of Gerry along the road. This both puzzled and bewildered her. And still again she stared back through the settling dust.

Then she saw, and understood. She saw the heavy roadster half-way up the slope of the side-hill, with its nose buried in a privet-hedge, oddly suggestive of a shoat rooting for tubers. And on the dust-powdered grass beside it she saw Gerry, lying startlingly inert, with a stain of red on the putty-colored motor-coat.

She made incoherent small cries of protest as she left her car in the middle of the road and ran back to him. She bent over him, and unbuttoned his coat, and saw the little stream of red running from a cut on his wrist.

"Oh, Gerry, I've killed you!" she wailed as she sat down beside him and tore a band of white from her petticoat and bound up the bleeding wrist. He opened his eyes as she stooped over her work, and promptly closed them again. "Oh, my

love, my love, I've killed you!" she said in helpless little moans as she struggled to knot the bandage tight over the well-wrapped wrist-bone.

It reminded her of her aeronautical days of old. And she tried to tell herself to be calm, and to remember what one should do in such cases. She even slipped a hand over his heart, and found it to be beating, and summoned up the courage to study his face. On his left temple she noticed a lump, almost as big as a shirred egg, and a subsidiary small pain shot through her as she remembered how much it looked like the lump Gunboat Dorgan had once brought out on Raoul Uhlan's pallid forehead. She was brushing the dusty hair back from this slowly discoloring lump when she awakened for the first time to the knowledge that the driver of the motor-truck was not only standing there beside her, but addressing her in none too commiserative tones.

"Yuh've kilt him, all right, lady! Yuh've kilt him, and I s'pose yuh're satisfied!"

"I haven't killed him," protested Teddie as she took Gerry's head in her lap.

"Yuh sure set out to kill something," announced the blue-denimed giant from the truck. "And this looks to me like yuh got what yuh was after!"

"Don't be silly," cried Teddie. "But get into my car and get back here with a doctor. Do you understand: I want a doctor right away!"

"It'd be more sensible to get the body into the truck," maintained the heartless one in blue-denim.

"You get that doctor!" blazed Teddie with a stare which drove the truck-driver off even as naked steel might have done. And when he was gone she leaned over the still inert Gerry, and wiped the dust from his face with her tiny mockery of a handkerchief, and murmured ridiculous little incoherencies which made him open one eye, like a sleepy hound on a hearth-rug, and quite inconsiderately close it again.

"Oh, Gerry!" she moaned as she put her hand once more in under his vest, to make sure his heart was still beating, and

fell to pondering the reason for a resultant small writhe of his body. She leaned closer over his face, assuring herself that he was still breathing.

Then she stooped still lower. She slipped an arm in under his head and held his dusty cheek against hers. *And then she kissed him.*

She kissed him grimly, determinedly, abandonedly, saying "Oh, Gerry!" in foolish little gasps and not bothering to wipe away the tear that was running down her nose.

Then she sat back, with his head still in her arms, for his eyes were open and gazing up into her face.

"How dare you do that?" demanded Gerry, in a voice singularly steady for one so recently emerging from unconsciousness.

"Oh, Gerry!" repeated Teddie, hugging him tight. And she kissed him again, out of sheer relief at finding him still anchored to the same muddled-up old world with her.

"You'll have to marry me for this, re-

member!" announced Gerry, doing his best to look magisterial.

"I couldn't live without you, Gerry," she had the honesty to acknowledge. "And they said I was going to lose you!"

"Not if I know it," proclaimed her captive.

Teddie looked up for a moment at the sadly wrecked roadster.

"But it wasn't sporting of me, Gerry!"

"What wasn't?"

"Everything—everything I've done!"

Gerry reached out with his one good arm.

"No queen, Teddie, can possibly do wrong. But there's one thing, Belovedness, I want to know, I've got to know."

"What is it?"

"I've got to know just why you kissed me!"

Teddie studied him with solemn eyes. Then she studied the lengthening shadows along the valley-slope and the blue hills beyond.

"Because, Gerry, you're so different from other men," she finally acknowledged.

THE LOST TITIAN

The Lost Titian

CHAPTER ONE

Conkling stopped his car. He drew up, dry and dust-laden, in the narrow green gullet of the side-road overhung with sycamore and soft maple. A cooler breath of air sighed out through the oval frame of verdure slightly powdered with road-dust and slightly suggestive of a woman with prematurely silvered temples.

Conkling sat staring down the open throat of the hill-lane which dropped away like a waterfall toward the misty blue of Lake Erie. To the east he could see the opal green of Rond-Eau, iridescent as mercury in its verdigris-tinted shadow-box of rushes and wild-rice. Beyond that confusion of intermingling greens he could see the long line of Pointe Aux Pins, seeming

neither main-land nor cloud-land, but floating aerially in the veiled light, as misted and mirage-like as the ghostly plume of smoke trailing behind a ghostly coal-boat nosing slowly in toward the harbor. Directly in front of him he could see only the diminishing mottled terraces of the tree-tops selvaged with the paler green of willows where the lake-cliffs ended abruptly in the pallid blue of the water. A mile out on this water, hazy with the windless heat of August, he could discern the vague L of a pile-driver, floating beside a row of pound-stakes. It floated there ghostly and insubstantial, a blurred and lonely shadow that seemed to belong more to the air than to the water.

Conkling liked that view, with its receding vistas and its abrupt suggestion of repose. He liked it so much that he regretted not having seen it in spring, in the virginal greenery of its first awakenings. He even surrendered to an impulse to dip deeper into it, by releasing his foot-brake and letting his car coast quietly down the overarched incline of broken shadow and

sunlight. That impassive and almost noiseless descent, with his engine silent, seemed to him like an aerial flight into some older and sleepier world. When a cushioning carpet of pine-needles finally brought him to a stop, he was satisfied to sit there, within twenty paces of a weather-bleached gate which marked a gap in the straggling undergrowth of cedar.

This gate, as a gate, challenged his attention. Yet he studied it for several minutes before reaching for his pack easel and thumb box and climbing down from his car-seat. Then he proceeded to inspect the gate at closer range. It was antiquated and uninviting and it sagged on one hinge. But beyond it, he found as he leaned across its moldering top bar, lay an arresting vista of checkered sunlight and cool green shadow centering in the warm red of a brick manor-house.

That glimpse of an unexpected old garden, cool and shadowy and secluded behind the sheltering cedars, held him so close that he overlooked the No Trespassing sign which semaphored so forbiddingly

down at him from a half-dead silver birch. For here in the heart of a country which had impressed him as a land without a past he had stumbled across a homestead with the true patina of time upon it.

And here, he told himself, was surely a chance for some of that old walnut and mahogany for which, in the eyes of the native, he stood ready to pay romantic prices.

So closely did he inspect the red-brick manor-house that it was several minutes before he became conscious of the girl standing within ten paces of him. She stood there in a birdlike attitude of arrested movement, with her body pressed in close to the hedge, as though timorously anxious to escape his eye. And he realized, as he stared at her, how some unconsidered protective coloration was causing her to merge into the brocaded background of that ruinous old garden. For she wore a lilac-colored sunbonnet and a frock of flowered organdie, and her hands were incased in a pair of russet gauntlets which had plainly known better days. Conkling

could see that she had been engaged in clipping streamers of wild grape from the hedge which half screened her. She still held a pair of rusty-looking rose shears in her fingers.

He no longer studied the garden, with its sundial slightly awry and its unused fountain and its shadowed turf-slope and ragged paths edged with perennials. It was the girl that held his attention, and oddly enough, his first vague feeling of depression slipped away from him. Just what lay at the root of that depression he could not have said. But he felt so like a wanderer into regions of desolation touched with mystery that the opening lines of *Childe Harold to the Dark Tower Came* kept recurring to his mind. And it struck him as odd that he should spot a figure so vivid in a background so dolorous. For the girl's eyes were a cornflower blue, made deeper in color by the thickly planted black lashes. Her hair, which even the abundant hood of the sunbonnet could not altogether hide, was a burnished mahogany brown. Yet her face itself, which struck

him as austere and a trifle pinched, held its undertones suggestive of still youthful vitalities, of unawakened ardencies. It was the lips, he decided, with the faintly rebellious lines about their warmth, which did the trick. But there was breeding in that face, and something even more than breeding; something which he could not quite decipher, but was content in the end to write down as intensity. This played the added trick of making her seem, to Conkling, like a child prematurely aged, vaguely silvered by the life about her, the same as her roadside sycamores had been silvered by dust. Yet as his quick gaze rested on the gravely innocent eyes and the rose-like cream and pink of the arm above the gauntlet-top he was again perplexed by a persistent sense of girlishness.

Those gravely non-committal eyes, however, were no longer even covertly observing him. The gloved hands were once more decorously busy among the grape-vine tendrils. Conkling could see, by that austere preoccupation, that the grave-eyed

young lady with the rose shears was respectably eliminating him from her universe. He felt his color deepen. Yet it was only by audacity, he knew, that he could win his point. And the vague but universal air of impoverishment which overhung the place breathed life into his newer boldness. He pushed open the gate and stepped through it.

"Could I sketch a corner of your garden?" he inquired with all the casualness at his command.

The face under the sunbonnet turned slowly in his direction. But the eyes were still austerely non-committal.

"Sir?"

In that short monosyllable he noticed many things. He noticed a certain sharp fastidiousness of tone which spoke of caste. He caught from it a note of warning mixed with a cool and condescending forbearance. But in it, most of all, he found a beauty of timbre, a full-throated English resonance which he had not expected to stumble across in that higher-voiced Canadian

countryside. This was no peasant type, and the crisp monosyllable was apparently intended to remind him of the fact.

"Would you mind if I tried a water color of one end of your garden?" Conkling repeated, parading the folded stool and easel and thumb box, which had obviously escaped her attention.

The rose shears went on with their clipping. She was weighing his request, and as she did so she reverted oddly back to the child type. He found it hard to think of her as a woman. She seemed disturbed by the matter-of-factness with which he had put a matter-of-fact question. But it was plain that he was an outlander, a stranger unversed in the traditions of those reticent byways.

"If you wish to," she finally said, without stopping in her work.

It struck Conkling as odd that her face should go pale over a decision so trivial. It struck him as equally odd, when he unfolded stool and easel in the shadow of the cedar hedge, that the thin face should just as suddenly flush again. For he had

sagaciously made note of the direction in which the girl was working her way along this hedge, and he chose his position so that her activities, as time went on, would not take her farther away from him. Yet he opened up his thumb box and fell to work without further addressing her, only too conscious of the uninterrupted clicking of the shears behind him. If he sniffed an aroma of the idyllic in that situation he betrayed no signs of it. She had not, at any rate, taken to her heels; and he could afford to leave the outcome on the lap of time.

He turned, with a less impersonal eye, and studied the house. He was impressed by the pathos of its faded grandeur. It might at one time, built as it was in imitation of an English manor, have been a pretentious enough pile. But everything about it had long since fallen into decay. The neglected cornices drooped without paint. The mortar had fallen away from between the bricks. The dilapidated verandas, half covered with masses of Virginia creeper, showed a roof sadly broken and a

railing much awry. Here and there, in the tall French windows, a pane of glass had been replaced by an unpainted board. A broken stretch of eave troughing hung from an upper façade like an unkempt tress from a faded brow. On the parched slope to the right of its main entrance wandered a flock of hungry ducks, and under the maples, beyond the ducks, hobbled a solitary and disheveled peacock, which screamed from time to time at the advent of a stranger within its domains. On the nearer side of the house, beyond parterres of weeds and brambles which might at one time have been a rose garden, stood a tilted chicken brooder which had once been painted red, and the ruins of a cider press, with a row of overturned beehives in the background.

To the south, where the lawn sloped down to the empty fountain basin and was bisected by a narrow walk along which still flamed the valiant and invincible perennials, the aspect was less ruinous. Conkling could make out iris and phlox and ragged sailor and golden glow and tiger

lilies in a glorious tangle and riot of color. Beyond the sundial he could discern an arbor with broken seats, and beyond that again the heavy and huddled foliage which on all sides screened in from the outside world that little area of color and quietness. The next moment, however, his casually wandering glance came to a stop. It came to a stop abruptly, with his startled attention balking as a colt balks at a shadow across the roadway of reason. For before him, in the unequivocal open light of the afternoon, he saw an overturned marble sarcophagus. It was the sort of thing one stumbled across now and then in Italy, the sort of thing he had himself seen crated and lowered into ships' holds at Palermo and Catania, the sort of thing they kept behind brass railings in New World museums. But here it stood weather-stained on a slope of turf, with three tin milk-pans sunning on its mottled upturned bottom.

He sat squinting at the strange thing for a full minute. Then he turned to speak to the girl in the lilac sunbonnet.

But he did not speak. For from the direction of the house came the sound of a new and quite unexpected voice. It was a thin and acrid voice, obviously barbed with indignation.

"Julia!" was the repeated and reproving cry which echoed through the quietness.

The girl with the rose shears, more childlike than ever, turned a frightened face toward the house. But she did not answer.

"Is that a man in the grounds?" demanded the distant monitorial voice. And Conkling, for the first time, was no longer at his ease.

"Y-yes," the girl called hesitatingly back.

Her face was quite pale, and the meekness in her voice rather disturbed the man at the easel. He peered about for the author of that over-disturbing challenge, but he could see nothing.

"Lavinia," commanded the shrill and mysteriously distant voice—and Conkling

for a moment wondered why that name should fret his memory with an uncaptured association—"Lavinia, unchain Nero at once!"

Conkling caught a sound like a gasp from the girl with the shears.

"Please don't mind," she said without turning her head. "He's so old!"

"Who's so old?" asked Conkling. He had begun to repack his thumb box.

"Nero. I have to soak his bread crusts for him. He has no teeth left. But I really think you ought to go!"

There was no misjudging her distress. It amounted almost to terror, and the mystery of it was sufficient to revive his audacity.

"May I come back?" he asked, tingling a trifle before the amazed innocence of her eyes.

"What good could it do?" she found the courage to inquire.

"That's what I intended to find out," he told her. He said it more determinedly than he had intended.

"I don't think you understand," she said with her austere and troubled eyes on his face.

"Understand what?" he demanded.

"Us!" was all she said.

And it was all she had a chance to say, for the next moment the distant and indignant voice was commanding her to come to the house, and to come at once. She went without hesitation, like a bidden child. Conkling saw the deep gloom of one of the French windows swallow up the lilac sunbonnet and the organdie gown. Then he folded his easel and his camp stool, stared for a minute or two at the decrepid peacock and the overturned sarcophagus, and told himself that without a shadow of doubt he would come back.

CHAPTER TWO

Conkling went back. It was, indeed, rather a habit with him, this going back to authenticate the questionable, this returning to appraise the survivals of undecipherable civilizations. But before going back the technique of his calling as a collector, of his activities as an antiquarian, prompted him to assemble what data he could concerning the occupants of the old Kent County manor-house on the Lake Road.

He did not discover a great deal, and much of this, in the end, proved contradictory. But once he had tapped the rock of rural reticence he found a copious enough flow of the waters of hostility. The countryside apparently had very little that was good to say of the Keswicks. They were "queer" and felt themselves above their neighbors. They had even shot off an old

blunderbuss at certain youths of Weston who had raided the row of oxheart cherries in their orchard, and had allowed a horse to die of distemper without calling in a veterinary surgeon. As for the girl, Julia Keswick, she wasn't so bad as the two old she-dragons, but she was reputed to be a spitfire and hard to hold down. This, however, Conkling found neutralized by later information to the effect that the girl was as shy as a rabbit, and no one ever knew what she was up to. But she gave herself airs, chiefly, apparently, because she had been at a convent school in Quebec.

"And there was them as called her a beauty, and them as preferred a woman with more meat'n a sparrow on her bones!"

Yet the data concerning her two aunts, Georgina and Lavinia Keswick, was less ambiguous in coloring. These two antique maiden ladies were variously described as "a couple of old crows," "a pair o' bloodless old hardheads," and "a team o' skinflints who put pennies in the collection plate of a Sunday." There had been a

brother once, a rolling stone who wasted the family substance and went off to Europe once a year to buy marble lions and tombstones and paint little pictures on pieces of canvas. He had been a poor sort, this brother, and it couldn't have been much loss when he died of Roman fever somewhere in Italy, for he had always preferred daubing a picture of a field to driving a plow up and down its landsides. And you can't farm in a country like Canada with a camel's-hair brush! Not by a long shot! The two old crows still tried to run that farm, for they would endure no man about the place, but they couldn't even pay the interest on the mortgage, and year by year things were only getting worse. They'd be foreclosing on 'em any time now.

It would make great tobacco land, the upper half of the farm, once it was worked right. They could get five or six hundred a year out of it, easy, growing Burley on shares, but the two elderly Keswick women had religious scruples about surrendering land for the cultivation of the filthy weed.

Yet Belinda Brittner, who had been in service with them in the old days, claimed their religion to be a pretense and a mockery, remembering as she did how Miss Lavinia had turned the clock back on Saturday night so as to finish her strawberry jam without breaking the Sabbath, as she put it. And their believing themselves to be better than other folks was likewise a deception and a mockery before the Lord, for Belinda wasn't so blind that she didn't know they dined on dog-fish discarded on the beach by the pound-net fisherman, and frugally bought cat-meat which went to no cats, but was frugally stewed with sour-dock for their own parsimonious table. And when the *Annie Huff* missed the harbor mouth at Rond-Eau and pounded to pieces in a south-easter on the beach just below the Keswick farm the two old vultures had been discovered by certain midnight wanderers frugally salvaging everything washed up from the wreck.

Just why this was held against them Conkling could not quite define, just as he could not actively share in the rural indig-

nation against Kendal Keswick's fifteen-year-old crime of importing a figure model from New York. A justice of the peace had taken a hand in that affair and there had been high words in the attic studio of the old manor-house, where the model had been ordered in the name of the law to put on her clothes and take her departure by the first train to the States. And Kendal Keswick, after roundly cursing the country, had also taken his departure. That eccentric dilettante went morosely off to Italy, for a chance, as he put it, to breathe again. But there, ironically enough, he breathed his last before the end of the year.

All this, piled up before Conkling in a garrulous campaign of discouragement, only added a razor edge to that cool-eyed connoisseur's determination to revisit the Keswick manor-house. There was, he kept reminding himself, every reason to assume that this old house might be rich in the things he was most eager to obtain. But that purely antiquarian curiosity became perplexingly involved with the memory of

an intense-eyed girl with mahogany-tinted hair.

So two days later, when he parked his car in the deep shadow of a horse-chestnut beside the Lake Road, he felt that luck was with him when he caught sight of a lilac sunbonnet on the far side of the half-strangled cedar hedge. Yet his heart skipped a beat as he pushed open the broken gate, and in stepping though it seemed to step back a century in time.

The girl, who had a garden rake in her hand, paled a little as she caught sight of him.

"It was good of you to come back," she said quite simply. But that acknowledgment seemed enriched by the look of intensity on her face. It was a look, he was beginning to see, which was habitual with her, and had much to do with her persistent aura of childishness.

"I call it good of you to let me," he protested. Yet his eyes, as he spoke, were on the faded front of the old manor-house.

"*They* didn't understand," she said with her childlike immediacy.

"Understand what?" he asked.

"That you were an artist," she explained.

"But I'm not. I'm only a curio hound for a kindly old gentleman named Banning, who gives me a car and pays me money for wandering about and enjoying life."

"But you paint," she reminded him.

Conkling could afford to laugh at her solemnity.

"I thought I could paint once, but two years in Paris showed me I was barking up the wrong tree. About all I'm good for now is to size up other people's painting."

The girl's gaze became impersonal.

"*They* found that out," she admitted.

"Who did?"

"My aunts; and they're rather sorry now about Nero."

"Why?" he asked, with his eyes on her rapt young face. She was, after all, more of a child than he had imagined. But he had not missed the heat-lightning smile of humor that had played momentarily about her lips. And he was grateful for it. It humanized her; it tended to authenticate

her reality. He wanted, above everything else, to establish her as real, through and through, very much as he might wish some find in old mahogany not to thin out into mere veneer.

"Because my Aunt Georgina is rather anxious to see you," the girl was saying.

"About what?"

"About the things you're interested in."

"But how does she know what I'm interested in?" he demanded, pondering the fact that the enemy had also been active in the fields of reconnaissance.

The faded lilac sunbonnet slowly turned until it faced the house front.

"I don't think I can talk to you any longer," said the girl, with her non-committal eyes once more on his. "But she'll probably come out when she sees you here."

"But it's you that I'm interested in," he protested, impressed by the latent tragedy in the face which a lilac sunbonnet tended to turn into a mockery. It made him think of columbines in a churchyard.

Her color deepened painfully, but she did

not speak again. She left him there and crossed the sloping, parched lawn and entered the house.

Conkling, as he unfolded his camp stool and set up his easel, resented the passing of that slender and lightly swaying figure. The riot of color along the tangled garden paths seemed without meaning. The tones that had first caught his eyes became crude and uncoordinated under a hot afternoon sun. But he remembered what she had said, and he sat there, washing absurd colors together and wondering if she would come back. Then, as the shadows lengthened and time dragged on, he wondered if he was to be ignored even by the monitorial old aunts. But he daubed stubbornly on, and when his patience was all but exhausted he was rewarded by seeing a figure emerge from the house.

It was a remarkable figure, and as it bore down on him in silence he studied it with oblique intentness. For it was that of an extremely tall and an extremely angular woman, well past middle life, clad in rusty black silk. On the iron-gray hair,

parted and drawn severely down across the pale and narrow forehead, reposed a small black satin cap edged with coffee-colored lace. Half mittens of knitted linen were on the lank hands clasped so fastidiously in front of a narrow waist elongated by its ruchings of rusty silk. On the scrawny throat hung a cameo brooch, oddly repeating the line of the pendulous dewlap under the yellow chin, where the neck, as long and lean as a turkey's, suggested a poised and persistent wariness. But once this was passed over, there was a general air of limpness, of deadness, about every line of the long body. It was something suggestive of starvation, of starved lives and starved souls, of empty years eked out in empty ways.

It was, Conkling had to admit, a striking enough face, with its long and narrow boniness and its high-bridged nose. But there was a promise of cruelty in the small mouth with its down-drawn corners, where the earlier lines of haughtiness had merged into a pursed-up network of little wrinkles. The eyes were deep-set and cold, of faded

blue, with a touch of tragedy in the looseness of the skin-fold under the thin and high circling brows.

It was not the sort of face to make Conkling feel altogether at ease. Yet it held him spellbound. It seemed to step from another century.

He sat behind the fragile shelter of his easel, studying that face as it came to a stop before him, as it towered above him with a frown of interrogation on its flinty brows.

"Might I make so bold as to inquire the nature of your visit here?" the woman demanded in a voice as austere and unconceding as her face.

"The young lady said I might make a sketch of the garden," he explained, exasperated by the meekness which had crept into his own voice.

The scorn on the lean old face confronting him did not add to Conkling's happiness.

"Gentlemen were once in the habit of rising, as I remember it, when accosted by a lady."

"I'm sorry," cried Conkling, nettling brick red as he rose to his feet with his hat in his hand. "I beg your pardon," he murmured again as he essayed a jack-knife bow in which deference was not visibly shot through with mockery.

"I presume you are a stranger in this neighborhood," she said in an acridly condoning tone of voice.

"You are quite correct in that presumption," retorted Conkling, a little tired of being treated like an urchin caught in a cherry tree.

"Otherwise you would have respected the long-established wishes of the owner of this garden," concluded his enemy, with a glance at the No Trespassing sign.

"Undoubtedly, if I'd known in time," admitted the intruder.

The woman in the half mittens shifted her position a little.

"Since you paint, I suppose you are interested in paintings," she suggested.

Along that glacial frontier Conkling thought he detected certain surface melt-

ings, certain vague trickles of surrendering austerities.

"That is my business," he admitted.

"What is?" she demanded, not unaware of the impatience in his tone.

"Paintings and old furniture and *objets d'art* in general," he told her. "That's what I go about appraising and buying up for the New York expert who is foolish enough to trust such matters to my judgment."

She was plainly puzzled by his ironic note of levity.

"Am I to accept this as an acknowledgment that you do not understand your own business?" she asked in her pointed, monitorial severity of tone.

"To err is human," he said as he folded up his camp stool. "And several times I've paid good money for mahogany that turned out to be dyed boxwood."

Her solemnity, however, was unshakable.

"But in the matter of paintings," she persisted. "You've had experience with them?"

"Some very disagreeable experiences," he evaded, consoled by the consciousness that his enemy was in some mysterious way on the defensive.

"But if it's your business," she went on, with the austere old eyes fixed on his face, "you must understand about their value; you must have a reasonable idea of what they are worth."

"Madam, nobody understands that nowadays."

"Apparently not," she admitted. "But it's at least possible to estimate the market value of such things, is it not? The value which the dealers in a big city such as yours would set on a collection of canvases?"

There was a note of concession, of unlooked-for hesitation, in her voice as she spoke. It caused Conkling to become serious again.

"It's possible in a way," he explained to her. "But there are cases, of course, where even experts differ."

"But when it's a matter of old mas-

ters?" she pursued, with her pale eyes fixed on his face.

"Oh, they're all pretty much evaluated," he told her, "provided they are old masters."

She was about to speak again, but an interruption came in the form of a slow and distant clangor. It was a dinner gong, Conkling suspected. There was, however, no note of blitheness in its summons. It fell on his ears as depressingly mournful as a bell-buoy tolling over a fog-bound reef. It made him think of bells that he had heard in the second act of *Macbeth*.

"We are about to take tea," announced Georgina Keswick with the utmost solemnity, "and I trust you will give us the honor of your company."

Conkling was tempted to smile at this ponderous unbending. But he became sober again as he caught sight of a slender young figure in organdie passing from one side of the old manor to the other.

"That's very kind of you," he said, with his gaze following the girl in organdie as

she disappeared through one of the French windows. "I should like to very much."

He saw, as he started toward the house again, the solitary and stately peacock, perched motionless on the moldering upper bar of a grape trellis. He couldn't help wondering why it had no mate. He couldn't help wondering how it endured that decrepid grandeur of burnished crest and plume unshared by another. And he couldn't help wondering, as he meekly followed the gaunt and solemn woman in rusty black across the parched lawn-slopes, just what was ahead of him.

CHAPTER THREE

Conkling found himself in a faded room with faded damask curtains. It was a somber and musty-smelling room, but two walls of it were lined with open bookshelves edged with pinked morocco and surmounted by three Tanagra figurines which momentarily made him forget the mustiness about him. He caught sight of a carved *leggio* that must have come from the choir of an Italian church, and a mahogany pedestal table with dragon-claw feet on which stood a brass candelabrum with a square marble base. Yet the next moment he was shuddering inwardly at the sight of a handworked fire screen. On this screen, with thread and needle, patient fingers had fabricated a foolish landscape of waterfall and woodland and strolling ladies in hoop-skirts. It impressed him as not so much a monument of wasted effort

as it was a betrayal of a childish and impoverished outlook on life. And the house began to depress him, for even the black horsehair furniture so in need of repair became significant of a mean discomfort heroically endured.

His feeling of depression increased when the second sister entered the room. She came austere and silent and arrayed in plum-colored moiré. She impressed him as having hurriedly changed for the occasion and as still chafing under the necessity for that change. She seemed bonier and more muscular than her sister Georgina, and when Conkling saw her hands, calloused and toil-hardened and bloodless as bird claws, he was persuaded that she had been called away from labor in some neighboring field. Even her bow of greeting was a hostile one. And the young man in the stiff-backed horsehair chair fell to wondering why she had been so resolutely commandeered from her agrarian activities; and why, also, he was being so laboriously introduced into that house of sinister antiquities. He expected, until he saw tea

actually being served, that the girl, Julia Keswick, would be included in the gathering. But in this he was disappointed.

He thought about her a great deal as he sat drinking his tea. It was not good tea. It was weak and watery, just as a slight aroma of mustiness clung to the solitary biscuit which was served with it. The skimmed milk which was soberly spoken of as cream, the loaf of sugar which was doled out so sparingly, the old Coalport so pathetically chipped and cracked, all united to confirm his earlier impressions of a genteel poverty grimly accepted.

He wondered how the girl could stand it, and he could foretell what it would do to her. She would get like the other two in time. The years would pinch her in body and soul alike. Her color would fade and the fuller line of lip and throat would wither. Yet in her face he had detected something unawakened and anticipatory, something which made that grim house oppress him afresh with its sheathed claws of cruelty.

He was surprised to see Lavinia Kes-

wick, having drunk her cup of tea and eaten her wafer, rise grimly from her chair and as grimly leave their presence. Conkling surmised that she was already resolutely removing the plum-colored moiré and making ready for a delayed return to her scuffle hoe.

It was not until Georgina Keswick was alone with her guest that she returned to the matter uppermost in her mind.

"You have doubtless heard of my brother, Kendal Keswick, in the art world?"

She paused, as though waiting for the name to strike home. But to Conkling it meant nothing. For a moment the tragic pale eyes in the tragic old face took on a deeper pathos.

"He was an artist himself in his time," she stiffly acknowledged. "But he was also a collector."

"He would be before my time," mercifully explained the young man, puzzled by the air of hesitancy which had overtaken the rusty old crow confronting him.

"I presume so," acknowledged the wom-

an in black, contriving to make her survey of Conkling's still youthful figure a slightly contemptuous one.

"You spoke of him as a collector," Conkling found the heart to remind her, out of the ensuing silence. "And that naturally prompts me to ask what became of his collection."

The pallid old eyes grew less abstracted.

"Some of it he sold a year or two before his death."

"And the rest of it?"

"The rest of it has remained ever since in the possession of the family. They are, in fact, held in trust here by me and my sister."

"Paintings, you mean?"

"Yes, paintings," she admitted.

"Then they're the property, I take it, of your niece, Julia?" suggested the young man, only too glad to direct the line of talk into more congenial channels.

"Nominally, but not altogether," was the somewhat acidulated reply. "Julia's father, at his death, left many obligations behind him."

Conkling, vaguely chilled, waited for the woman in rusty black to speak again.

"In a country such as this there are few persons with a knowledge of art—of great art," she continued with an obvious effort. "And of late it has seemed advisable—advisable that these paintings, or at least a certain number of them, should be disposed of."

Conkling felt almost sorry for her. She was plainly not a woman who could easily ask a favor, yet behind that grim front, for all its momentary embarrassment, lurked an equally grim purpose.

"And you'd like me to look them over and tell you what I consider they're worth," suggested her visitor — "what they're worth from the New York dealer's standpoint?"

She blinked her eyes like an old eagle, plainly disturbed by his slightly impatient short cut to directness.

"It would be a great service," she said out of the silence.

"On the contrary, it would be a great pleasure," contended Conkling. "So

what's the matter with getting at it while the light's still good?"

He was startled to see a ghost of a flush creep up into her faded cheeks.

"That would be impossible to-day," she told him with something oddly akin to terror in the eyes which evaded his.

"Why not to-day?" he asked, intent on his study of her mysterious abashment.

"They will have to be prepared," she replied, ill at ease.

"What do you mean by prepared?"

"They will have to be cleaned, for one thing."

"And how do you propose cleaning them?" he demanded.

"I have always regarded coal oil and turpentine as quite satisfactory," she retorted, plainly resenting his tone.

"Then if your canvases are of any value you've been using something which will very quickly take the value out of them. You'd kill their color in no time. We wash a picture with cheesecloth in warm water and soap, the same as you'd wash fine lace; and a part of the trick is to dry it quickly

to keep it from warping. Then dissolve mastic tears in turpentine and put it on with a camel's hair brush, if you have to."

It was plain that she was as averse to criticism as she was unaccustomed to it.

"In that case perhaps the cleaning can be dispensed with," she replied with dignity.

"Then I suppose I can see 'em at once," he suggested. But her embarrassment returned to her.

"They will have to be arranged," she said with a solemnity which in some way went lame.

"How many canvases are there?" he asked.

"Between twenty and thirty," was the hesitating reply.

Conkling showed his surprise.

"It'll take time, of course, to go over a bunch like that."

"That," said Georgina Keswick with an air of escape, "is why I should prefer making an appointment for some other day."

"It all depends on the pictures, of course, just how long it'll take me."

"I don't think you'll find them altogether trivial."

He recalled the earlier allusion to old masters. But he had had experience with the bucolic conception of such things.

"Who are the artists?" he asked in his most matter-of-fact tone.

"I'm not sure," she said, after a moment's hesitation. "At least, not sure of all of them."

"But the ones you know?" he prompted. And again a period of silence reigned in the shadowy room before she spoke.

"There's a Decamps and two Corots and a Holbein," she said very quietly. "There is also a Constable—no, two Constables—and one Boldini, and what we were once led to believe was a copy of Correggio, though our late rector, who was in both Rome and Florence once, remained strongly persuaded that it was an original."

Conkling, as he sat staring at the faded face in the fading light, lost a little of his own color. It took his breath away. It was too much to believe.

"That's rather a formidable list," he murmured weakly enough, for the whole thing still seemed incredible.

Here, in the obscure corner of a Canadian colony, he was threatened with stumbling across a collection that might be the envy of a national gallery. They were claiming to have Corot and Correggio, Decamps and Holbein, housed in this decrepid old homestead hidden away in its ruinous old garden.

His bewildered eye rested for a moment on the Tanagra figurines. Yet they only added to his disturbance, for the man who had captured them, he knew, had been a good picker; and nothing, after all, was too preposterous for such a house.

"When shall I come back?" he asked, with rather an anxious face.

"Will to-morrow at two be convenient?" he heard his hostess in rusty black inquiring.

"I'll be here at two," he said with a belated effort at professional impersonality. But it was an abortive effort, for he had become too actively conscious that he

stood on the threshold of some high adventure. And so sharp was that inner excitement that he even forgot about Julia Keswick until he saw her rose shears hanging on a cedar twig near the broken gate.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conkling, on returning to the Keswick house for the second time, nursed an elusive sense of frustration. He nursed, as well, a sense of playing little more than a secondary rôle in a drama of deferment. For the accessories of the drama were not arranging themselves as he might have wished. On his way back to the manor-house he had come face to face with Lavinia Keswick, and that austere old figure, seated in a decrepid canopied phaëton drawn by a rawboned mare, had either failed or refused to recognize him. He was further depressed by the ominous silence which reigned when he pounded on the faded manor-door with the heavy brass knocker in the form of an ape with laughter on its embittered metal face. But in a minute or two the door was opened, and Julia Keswick herself stood confronting him.

She was dressed in Quaker gray, and seemed more repressed and more mature than when he had first caught sight of her. But she had the power, for all her quietness, of once more making his pulse skip a beat or two.

"I was to look over the pictures," he explained, noticing her hesitancy.

"I'm afraid that won't be possible today," she told him in a tone of constraint.

"But your aunt asked me to," he reminded her.

"I know, but there has been an accident."

"A serious one?" he asked.

"I hope not. But my Aunt Georgina slipped on the attic steps and sprained her ankle. It's paining her a great deal, and she has gone to bed."

"Could I possibly see her?"

A ghost of a smile appeared on the girl's face. It would not be easy to explain to him that no living man had ever beheld her Aunt Georgina in bed. So she merely shook her head.

"Then how about your Aunt Lavinia?"

Again the girl shook her head.

"She has had to go to Weston to see a lawyer about a mortgage foreclosure—and she has always hated the pictures."

"Then why couldn't you show them to me?" he suggested.

"I don't think my aunt would approve of that."

"But in an emergency like this?" he contended.

"I wouldn't be allowed to," she said with an odd flattening of the voice. "Some of them are not——" she broke off. Her shoulder movement was a half-ironic one. "Even my aunt objected to some of them. She was carrying one of the bigger canvases down to her bedroom when she slipped and fell."

"That was unfortunate," he perfunctorily exclaimed. His mind, for the moment, seemed to be on other things. It was his glance into the girl's face, where he sensed pennons of valor behind the bastions of silence, that brought his thoughts back to the present.

"But why to her bedroom?" he asked.

"To hide it away," was the level-noted reply. And again their glances came together.

"What was the nature of that canvas," he finally asked, "the canvas that caused the accident?"

There was a silence of several seconds before she answered.

"It was a Bouguereau!"

He was able to smile as he studied her in the shadow of the weather-bleached doorway. He understood, at last, the grim valor of her gaze. And she saw that he understood, and seemed glad of it.

"It's all ridiculous, of course," he said with his renewing smile of comprehension. "But it's at least given me the chance of seeing you again."

She in turn studied him for a moment or two with her intent eyes. Then she slowly changed color.

"I'm sorry," she finally said.

"About what?"

Her slow look back over her shoulder had not escaped him. But he was quite satisfied to stand and stare at her. She

seemed the only point of life in that house of dead and silent mustiness.

"I can't talk to you any longer," she said in lowered tones. "I really can't!"

"Why not?" he demanded.

"I'd be punished for it," she told him, without meeting his eye, "cruelly punished."

She had spoken quietly enough, but there was an undertone of passion in her words.

"That doesn't sound reasonable," he expostulated. For she seemed, in her present mood and posture, far removed from the child.

"It isn't," he heard her answering. "But there's nothing I can do about it."

"How old are you?" he asked with a frankness sired by impatience.

"I'm nineteen—almost twenty," she told him, with her habitual impersonal candor.

"Then that makes it more unreasonable than ever," he proclaimed with a touch of triumph.

"All my life has been unreasonable."

"But——" he began, and broke off. Still

again their glances had met and locked, and he seemed to drink courage from the quietness of her eyes. "Why couldn't I see you?"

"See me?" she echoed.

"Without them knowing it," he explained, paling under his tan.

She stood silent a moment.

"Where?" she finally asked, in little more than a whisper.

"What's the matter with that old arbor of yours at the foot of the garden?" he suggested.

He still misunderstood her hesitation, for it was resolution and not timidity which was so completely whitening her face.

"Why couldn't you meet me there, about nine o'clock to-night?"

"That would be too early," she said, bewilderingly composed.

"Then say ten," he persisted, marveling at his own unpremeditated deadly earnestness; and still again she stood silent. But she found the courage to lift her intent eyes and let them rest on his face. It seemed significant of tremendous capitula-

tions. But when she spoke she spoke very quietly.

"I'll be there."

Conkling watched her retreat into the shadow and watched the faded door swing slowly shut between them. Then he turned and went down the steps. He went away this time without thinking of the pictures, and he went with no slightest sense of disappointment.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conkling, as he waited in the shadowy arbor, was conscious of a series of rhythms. One was the distant rise and fall of lake water on its pebbled shore. Another was the antiphonal call of katydids from the mass of shrubbery behind him. Still another was the stridulous chorus of the crickets in the parched grass, rising and falling with a cadence of its own. And still another was the beat of his own pulse, quickened with an expectancy which tended to disturb him.

He waited for almost half an hour. Then Julia Keswick came ghost-like out of the dusk, heavy with its mingled smell of phlox and mignonette. He stood up, once he was sure who it was. She, too, stood, without speaking, face to face with him in the filtered moonlight.

"Was it hard?" he asked inadequately and with a quaver in his voice. She missed

his small gesture of self-accusation in the darkness.

"It was dangerous," she admitted, more composedly than he had expected.

"What would happen if they knew?" he questioned, more conscious of her nearness than of the words he was uttering.

"I could never go back," she told him. The forlornness of her voice, for all its composure, brought a surge of pity through his body. There was, however, something faintly dismissive in her movement as she sat down on the rough seat. "I want to talk to you about the pictures," she said in a more resolute voice.

"But I'd much rather talk about you," he objected, and he waited, with his heart in his mouth, to see if she challenged that audacity.

"I've seen you only three times before to-night," she said, staring off through a break in the shrubbery where a stretch of the lake lay like moving quicksilver.

"Well, a good deal can happen in that time," he argued, wondering where his courage had gone.

"I've found that out," she said with her Keswick candor.

He leaned closer to see her face. She did not move.

"Everything seemed clouded and hopeless before you came," he heard her saying.

"Oh, you're still thinking of the pictures," he said, with a note of disappointment.

She laughed, almost inaudibly.

"I wish we didn't have to think about them," she told him.

He found something oddly inflammatory in that acknowledgment. "Then let's not think about them," he suggested. "Why should we, on a night like this?"

She did not answer him. But out of the prolonged silence that fell between them a tree toad shrilled sharply somewhere over their heads. He turned and stared across the garden at the distant house front. It seemed less sinister, bathed as it was in its etherealized wash of light. But it depressed him.

"I shouldn't have asked you to do this," he said, with remorse in his voice.

"It's the most wonderful night I have ever known," her small voice answered through the dusk.

"It is to me, too," he told her, conscious of some gathering tide which was creeping up to him, which was taking possession of him, which was carrying him along on its tumbling and racing immensities.

"And it can never happen again," she said, as much to herself as to him.

"Why can't it?" he demanded.

"How can it?" she quietly countered.

"But I intend to make it!" he cried.

She sat back against the arbor railing, apparently startled by the passion in his voice.

"I'd rather you didn't say things like that," she told him.

"Why?" he asked.

"I want you to be always wonderful to me."

"But I mean it," he said, his voice shaking.

She stood up with what seemed her first gesture of timidity. He could see her face,

flower soft, in the ragged square of moonlight which fell across her shoulders. He rose to his feet and stood beside her, with his pulses pounding. Then in the silence he reached out for her hand and turned her about so that she faced him.

"Don't you see what it means to me?" he said, his face above hers in the uncertain light.

She looked down at her imprisoned hand, but that was all. He leaned closer. Her eyes closed as he kissed her.

"You must not do that if you don't mean it," she said almost abruptly and with a passionate intensity which startled him.

"But I do mean it, so much more than I could ever put into words," he cried, more shaken than he had imagined. "I love you."

Her hand went up to his shoulder in a gesture of helplessness.

"Are you sure?" she exacted. "Are you certain?" she repeated, with a soft desperation which left her adorable.

He took her in his arms and held her close as he murmured, "As certain as life!"

He kissed her again, this time more appropriately, more masterfully. And with it a lifetime of repression went up in flames.

"I love you," she said, her grim Keswick candor once more asserting itself. "I'll always have to love you, whatever happens." She turned away from him a little and stared toward the shadowy front of the old manor-house. "I don't care so much now what they say."

"Why should you?" he demanded, realizing how little he had thought of the world beyond that arbor.

"This is my only home," she told him, quite simply. "I can live here only by doing what is demanded of me."

"But when those demands are absurd?"

"That doesn't seem to have made much difference."

"But you're—you're a woman now, and you have your human rights."

"That's easy to say," she told him.

"But my world's been very different from yours."

"Then we've got to bring them closer together," he said, stirred by the wistfulness of her face.

"Bring what together?" she asked, apparently not following him.

"Your world and mine!" he said, quite grimly.

He took possession of her hand again. But she moved her head slowly from side to side. It seemed a protest against the impossible.

"It's got to be done!" he proclaimed. That cry, however, seemed to fall short of her attention.

"But I can show you the pictures now," she said in a tone of quiet challenge.

"What have the pictures got to do with us?" he demanded, resenting the intrusion of a workaday world on that moment of tensed emotion.

"Everything," the girl told him. "That's why you must see them."

"When?" he asked, resenting not only her movement away from him but also the

manner in which the trivialities of his calling could so stubbornly re-impose themselves on his moments of exaltation.

"It will have to be like our meeting to-night—without their knowing. I'll send you word in some way—in the morning. But it will have to be secret. And now I must go!"

"That way?" he challenged, with bitterness in his voice.

She came to a stop, staring at him through the dusk for a moment of silence. Then she slowly lifted her arms, and as slowly stepped across the filtered moonlight until she came to where he stood waiting for her.

CHAPTER SIX

It was early the next day that a sandy-headed small boy brought a note to Conkling at his hotel in Weston. The note was from Julia Keswick. It merely said "Come at once."

The brevity of that note disturbed him, but he lost no time in responding to its summons. When, as he started out, he once more caught sight of Lavinia Keswick in the old family chariot, this time proceeding somberly down the main street of Weston, he interpreted that migration as a ponderable reason for the hurried summons. But he remained ill at ease, even as he crossed the parched lawn and dispersed the ducks gabbling about the house front.

The door opened before he had a chance to knock. The girl obviously had been on guard, awaiting him. Her hand, when he

took it, was passive, and she did not return his smile. Her face seemed preoccupied and pinched. Yet if she looked older, she looked none the less lovely to him.

"They know!"

She said it in little more than a whisper, as her eyes met his.

"Know what?" he had to ask, so intent was he on what the moment held for him.

"That we were together last night," she told him.

"And what does that mean?" he asked, surprised the next moment at her look of tragic intensity.

"It means, I suppose, that I at last have to act for myself. But I'd rather not talk about it now. The one thing I want is for you to come up and look over the pictures while we've still the chance."

"I'm ready," he said.

"We must go quietly," she warned him.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because this is one of the things in which I'm acting for myself," she said in the gloom of the hallway, once the door was shut behind him.

She piloted him deeper into that gloom, and up a stairway with black-walnut bannisters. Then after a moment of waiting silence at the stairhead they crept along the second gloomy hallway, passed through a door which they closed behind them, and faced a flight of steep and narrow steps leading to the upper story. There the girl, after a moment's thought, returned to the closed door behind her and quietly turned a key in the lock. Then she motioned to Conkling to mount the little stairway, where the light hung strong above their well of gloom.

He found himself, when he had emerged into that light, in a hip-roofed attic with a row of dormer windows along the north. It impressed him at first as little more than a large lumber room, for it was littered, like other rural attics he had seen, with broken furniture and frayed traveling trunks, with disorderly packing boxes and obsolete bric-a-brac and the banished impedimenta of an earlier generation. A stratum of golden light flowed in through the one window on the east. This light-

band was filled with floating motes, so active that it seemed like subaqueous life in its native element.

But the commonplaceness ebbed out of that dusty attic as Conkling, looking about, made out what was most unmistakably the remains of a Roman bath, a portion of a carved reredos in time-blackened oak, and beside a fractured ewer of *cloisonné* enamel a painted statuette that reminded him of the Artemis in the Museo Nazionale at Naples. He noticed a second sarcophagus, less imperfect than the one he had already observed in the dooryard, an empty easel with its heavy-timbered framework draped with cobwebs, and an artist's manikin without a head. Beyond these, in a cleared space which lay toward the southern wall of the attic studio, he discerned a vague pile covered with yellowed cotton sheeting.

This pile, he assumed, was the pictures. Yet those pictures, in some way, had already become subsidiary. A greater interest had usurped their place in his mind. But the sense of being on the threshold of some great adventure remained with

him as he watched the girl cross the dusty floor and proceed, without speaking, to lift away the faded cotton coverings.

What was to be revealed by those movements he could not tell. But it impressed him as being a pretty ridiculous way of treasuring canvases of any value or any origin, to leave them unprotected in an old fire trap of a farm-house attic. The whole thing, in fact, was ridiculous. The only element that redeemed it, that vitalized it, to him was the stooping, ardent figure with the strong side light on the creamy white of her throat and chin.

But the girl, as he stood studying her, had turned and looked at him.

"How shall I show them?" she asked in a moderated voice which he first accepted as awe, but later remembered to be based on ordinary caution.

"Just as they come," he told her, as casually as he could, intent on impressing her with that sustained deliberateness which one expects of the critic. "One at a time, if you can manage them. And I'll tell you when to change."

She showed him first what must have been a small collection of family portraits, for only lineal ties and obligations, he felt, could extenuate the somber monstrosities which silently anathematized him from their dusty frames.

"These don't count, of course," she said, noticing the absence of all approval from his intent face.

He could see the excitement under which she was laboring, for all her restraint. He felt vaguely yet persistently sorry for her. It was not an auspicious beginning, and he would have to be more circumspect, more non-committal. For whatever happened, however things turned out, it was going to mean more to her than he had imagined.

"This," she said in little more than a whisper as she placed a small canvas for his inspection, "is the Holbein."

He stepped forward a little, apparently to study it more intently. But the movement was scarcely necessary, for he saw almost at a glance that the thing was nothing more than a copy by an ordinarily adept student. More than once, in fact, he

had sat before the original in Munich. But he wondered how he was going to tell her.

Her questioning eye, in fact, was already on his face. So after deliberately prolonging his study he merely nodded his head.

"The next, please," he said with judicial matter-of-factness.

"This is one of the Constables," she quietly told him, catching her cue from that achieved impersonality of his.

His heart went down as he examined it, for it stood a confirmation of his earlier fears. The canvas in front of him was a copy, and nothing more. It was a much cleverer copy than the first one. But that scarcely excused the effrontery of the forgery, for the painting was signed. On the frame, too, was a lettered medallion, soberly attempting to authenticate it as a Constable.

"This was your father's collection, was it not?" he asked the girl.

"Yes," she told him.

"And he was an artist as well as a collector?"

She shook her head.

"He was not a good artist. But he loved pictures."

"And these he brought back with him after his different visits to Europe?"

"I think that was it, but my aunt has always refused to talk about them."

"Why?"

"She hated my father. She blames him for all the troubles that have come into her life."

"And now she takes that hate out on you?"

The girl did not answer his question. Instead, she placed a smaller canvas for his inspection and said: "Would you care to see the Corot now?"

It was the same story over again, only this time the copy was of a canvas with which he was not familiar; and again he wondered how he was going to be able to tell her. She became conscious of his increasing gravity.

"You don't like them?" she asked at a venture.

The only thing he liked in all that dusty-aired attic was the slender, stooping figure

with its aura of repressed ardencies. But this, he knew, was not the time to say so.

"How do you feel about them?" he countered, watching her as she turned toward him and absently rubbed her fingers together. It struck him at first as a movement of repudiation, but he remembered that it was merely an effort to remove the attic dust from her hands.

"It's hard to explain," was her answer. "Some of them I dislike and some of them I can't understand, and there are a few of them I almost hate."

"Why?" he asked.

"I don't think I could make it clear to you," was all she said.

He saw no light through the blind wall of his dilemma, and he could not quite see how the first move was to be made. So he asked, in a merciful effort at postponement: "What pictures were taken from this collection?"

"My father took the ones he liked when he went away the last time. He took them all but one." She had misunderstood him.

"No; you spoke of your Aunt Georgina

carrying some of them downstairs when she fell," he reminded her. "What were they, besides the Bouguereau?"

She met his glance courageously in the clear light that flooded them.

"One was a copy of Manet's *Breakfast on the Grass* and the other was the *Olympe.*"

He began to divine the demands he had made on her courage.

"They were nudes?"

"Yes," she acknowledged.

"And that was the reason they were removed?" he asked, smiling in spite of himself.

"They hate everything like that."

He found it harder than ever to go on. So he said almost curtly: "Let's see the Correggio."

She turned back to the stacked canvases.

"Now the others," he commanded, after he had confirmed his suspicions as to the larger canvas with the mendacious medallion on its tarnished frame.

He went through them patiently, and the inspection left him more depressed

than he could understand. Yet he was tired of equivocation. He felt that nothing was to be gained by any further deferment of the death sentence.

"I'm afraid I have a very great disappointment for you," he began as gently as he could.

He watched her as she turned slowly away and stared at the stacked canvases and the strips of faded cotton littering the floor. He could detect no stirring of emotion on her face, and for a moment he thought she had failed to catch at the note of forewarning in his voice.

"You mean they're not so valuable—not so valuable in the matter of dollars and cents—as my Aunt Georgina has been led to believe they are?"

"I'm sorry," said Conkling, "but the two Constables are only copies, and there's no chance of being mistaken when I say the Holbein is a palpable forgery. The Correggio is not even worth considering. It impresses me as a gallery student's sketch —the sort of thing they used to sell to tourists by the mile. Strictly speaking, it has

no commercial value. As for the others—well, candidly, I'm afraid it would scarcely pay you to put them in an agent's hands. They're not the character of work a city dealer could handle—could handle with any degree of profit to you and your aunts, I mean."

She studied his face with her questioning, grave eyes.

"I was afraid so," she finally said, with a new listlessness in her voice.

"I know it hurts," he said, moving toward her, "and I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what?" she asked with no reciprocal movement.

"That instead of bringing you happiness at the very first I've only been able to bring you the other thing."

"I wasn't thinking about myself," she told him. "I was thinking more about them."

He knew that she meant the two strange old women with whom she lived, with whom she had lived; and in the strong side light, as she stood there still vital and ardent and unawakened, he tried to picture

her face as it might be in the years to come, pinched with time and penury, devitalized by the vampire seasons which would drink up the blood from her warm bosom, dulled and hardened by the mean and monotonous years of backwater existence. She impressed him as too warm and rich to be wasted on that sterile air, and he fell to wondering how she would respond to the world as he knew it, to that tranquil and sophisticated world which would be so new to her. Under the fuller sun of freedom, he told himself, she would open up like one of the tea roses in the old manor-house garden below them. He imagined her emerging from the Pennsylvania Station in a taxi-cab, with all New York towering about her in the pale gold of early autumn. But that thought stopped short, for she was speaking again.

"It was their only hope," she was saying, with her meditative eyes on the leaning array of canvases. "It seemed the only thing that could have saved them from all their hopelessness, from all the misery that has made them what they are."

He thought of that sepulchral pair, immured in their withered and Old World narrownesses, but he thought of them without pity. They were as set as granite, those two old vultures, and nothing would ever move them—would ever change them.

"It will mean just keeping on in the same old way until the end," he heard the voice of Julia Keswick saying.

"But surely there's some way out for them," he protested without giving much thought to his words.

"There is!" asserted the girl with a flash of what seemed defiance on her face.

"What is it?" he asked.

"There is a painting I haven't shown you."

He noticed for the first time that her face had grown almost colorless. He could see the lips that carried a touch of rebelliousness, framing themselves into what seemed a line of fortitude. It added to her air of maturity. Yet she became girlish again as she met his glance with what was almost a look of audacity.

"I didn't intend you to see it," she told

him, and he felt that there was now almost a challenge in that steady gaze of hers.

"Why not?" he asked, nettled by a sense of remoteness drifting between them.

"Because I know my aunts would not wish it to be seen. It has been kept hidden year after year."

"Why?" repeated Conkling.

She was silent for a moment or two. She was no longer looking at him. But for the second time he became conscious of the achieved air of fortitude in her averted face.

"They would say it was—it was sinful."

She stood silent a moment when he asked for the reason.

"Because it's a nude," she finally said, looking up at him. He had no means of judging what that moment was costing her. He could even afford to smile a little.

"Well," he demanded, "what of that?"

"I've already told you that my aunts do not approve of such things," she said with an appeal in her eyes which he could not understand.

"Do *you?*" he queried almost bruskly.

He noticed that her pallor had increased in the last minute or two.

"Yes, I do," she said with a return of her earlier defiant tone. "I can't help feeling that this picture is beautiful. I know there is nothing wrong about it—that there is nothing to be ashamed of in looking at it."

"Why should there be?" he demanded.

The girl's glance wandered involuntarily back toward the stairhead.

"They would say it was wrong."

That reiterated use of the pronoun began to impress him with the extent to which "they" had dominated and dwarfed her life.

"But some of the world's most beautiful and most valuable pictures are nudes," he protested. "Surely we don't need to go into all that!"

"I've felt that way," she said after a silence, as though the confession were a relinquishment of something momentous, of something which she would not lightly part with.

"Would you rather I didn't see this pic-

ture?" he asked with a second wind of patience, troubled by the look on her face.

"No!" she said almost with fierceness. "I want you to see it! You must see it!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Julia Keswick stooped low as she stepped in under the sloping roof, coming to a stop before a large canvas, covered with faded blue-and-white ticking, which leaned against the wall. Conkling watched her, with a revived impression of the epochal close about him, as she drew away this ticking and swung the framed picture about so that it faced him.

Yet his next impression was one of sharp disappointment, for all he saw was a mediocre landscape of muddy and mediocre colors. It struck him as a climax of disillusionment, and his heart went down like a lift. And like a lift, having reached bottom, it began to ascend again, for he could see the stooping girl oddly intent on turning the metal latches on the back of the heavy frame. When the inclosed canvas was released she let it fall back a little

from its confining ledges, and then drew it sidewise out of the frame. The movement reminded him of a photographer withdrawing the slide from a plate holder.

But he had no chance to let his mind dwell on that movement, for a moment later his eyes were startled by a sudden impression of gold and ivory merging into a flow of soft and melting line and re-emerging into vivid and gracious contours which brought a catch in his throat. He stood staring at this second canvas which had been hidden under the first, stood staring at it with that faint tingling of the nerve ends with which the astonished senses sometimes dizzily capitulate to sheer bewilderment.

"Great God!" he gasped. And there was reverence in that ejaculation, for all its sharpness.

"What is it?" whispered the girl, catching an echo of his amazement.

"Great God!" he repeated in his own whisper of awe. "It's a Titian!"

He saw before him the figure of a woman holding an apple. The apple was golden,

but not more golden than the soft ivory glow of the woman's body, bathed in its wash of purifying color. That body made Conkling's mind flash back to the Borghese with its *Sacred and Profane Love* and a moment later revert to the *Magdalen* in the Pitti. There was the same divine fullness of throat and breast, the same wealth of red-gold hair, the unmistakable mellowness of color and melting loveliness of line. There was a largeness and power in the conception of the figure, a stubborn yet exalted animality, which convinced Conkling the canvas before him belonged to Titian's later days. Yet as he studied it he objected to the word "animality." He preferred to substitute the phrase "spiritualized paganism" as he deciphered subtler effects which made him think of the National Gallery *Magdalen* and remember the abundant glow of bosom in the *Flora* of the Uffizi, the machinery of human life made adorable to human eyes.

"It's a Titian!" he repeated in a shocked and half incredulous whisper as he stepped still closer to the canvas.

That canvas, he could see, had suffered somewhat through the vicissitudes of its history. Extremes of heat and cold obviously had imposed a slight rimple of fine lines on its surface. But this did not greatly trouble Conkling. He even found in it, in fact, an accidental and subsidiary delight, for it added eloquence to its tone of time and enriched its note of history with an accentuation of age. But the miracle that it could have been carried unknown and unheralded across the Atlantic, that it could lie for years in the attic of a dilapidated Ontario manor-house, tended to take his breath away. He knew enough of Titian to remember that much of that great Venetian's work had been lost. He had Vasari to back him up in that. More had been lost, in fact, than had survived, but behind the possession of that painting, he knew, lay a history which would not be easy to unravel. It impressed him as something which kings might have intrigued over. He recalled how nearly two centuries ago, when the *Flora* was unearthed to Florence, a nation practically

ceased warfare to come and stare at the canvas—and it would soon be America's time to stop and stare.

The girl moved closer to his side, but he remained unconscious of her presence there. He did not see the rapt light in her eyes. The look of vague triumph on her face was lost to him. It was, in fact, several minutes before he even remembered her. Then it came home to him what the picture meant, not to the America which was to stop and stare, but to the impoverished household where it lay like a jewel hidden away in a straw mattress. He remembered what it would mean to that haughty and broken pair so in need of sustenance. It was their release—their salvation. That benignant golden figure with the apple of desire in her clustered fingers stood the goddess who was to work the miracle, who in a day might transform their penury into plenty. And this thought took his attention back to Julia Keswick.

She was studying him, he saw, with troubled eyes in which some new anxiety seemed to be formulating itself.

"You needn't worry," he told her, though he smiled the next moment at the inadequacy of his phrasing. "That canvas is a Titian. There's not a shadow of doubt about it. There's no chance of a mistake. No copyist could ever turn the trick like that—not in a thousand years! The only thing that leaves me stumped is how it ever got here."

"I've never been told about it, of course," she explained, with a slight tremolo of excitement in her voice. "I don't think there was anybody to tell about it after my father died. But in a letter to a French artist named Branchaud, which must have been returned undelivered after he went to Italy for the last time and was among his papers, father wrote that he'd live on acorns and sleep in a dog kennel before he'd part with the T. 'T,' I remember, was all he had written. He said it had cost him too much—too much in blood and tears and worry and work. There was something about a monk at Parma, a monk who had sinned against both God and man, as the letter put it, to whom father had

first gone to buy one of West's portraits of Shelley."

"Where is that letter?" asked Conkling.

"My aunts burned it four or five years ago. They saw nothing in it but what was discreditable, and destroyed it along with the other things of father's which they wanted out of existence."

"The fools!" he cried with a sudden hot resentment.

"What father wrote about it costing him so much in worry and work used to make me wonder if he had copied it at some time with his own hand. I tried to believe that, and it made me prouder of him."

Conkling shook his head.

"You were wrong there," he said. "That canvas has got what you can't copy. The secret of it slipped away from the world over three centuries ago. And no one has ever got within speaking distance of it again."

Slowly she moved her head up and down, as though consoled by some final confirmation of a long doubtful issue. A faint tinge of color even crept back into her face, and

Conkling stood arrested by the miraculous echo of loveliness which the living face seemed to catch from the painted face so close above it. It made him think of a woodland pool overhung by an April twilight. Then his eye wandered on to the Quaker gray of her gown. It made a frame too dull for the buoyant ardencies of her thin young body. And it came home to him how soon, now, that dullness could be done away with.

"All this reminds me of what brought me here under your roof," he went on, doing his best to key down to her own quietness of tone. "You've asked me to tell you what your pictures are worth. But all I'm going to do is to try to give you an idea of what this one is worth. I don't want to exaggerate, but I'd say this one canvas is worth your farm, and your neighbors' farms, and every farm and all they hold between here and Weston!"

"You mean to an artist?" she ventured, with the color once more slipping away from her face.

"No, I mean to a dealer, to a collector,

to any one with the brains to recognize what it is. As I say, I don't want to exaggerate. In one way it's not easy to figure out—in dollars and cents, I mean. But I'm being as reasonable as a man who says a loaf of bread is worth ten cents when I say this Titian is to-day, as it stands there, worth at least three or four hundred thousand dollars."

It was bewilderment, more than elation, that showed on her face. He even detected a touch of incredulity there as she turned back to the mellow glow of light reflected from the canvas.

"That sounds ridiculous, perhaps, but I know about such things. It has been my business to know. For instance, there was the Panshanger *Raphael,* sometimes spoken of as the Small Cowper *Madonna,* which Widener paid seven hundred thousand dollars for. And the same collector, when he brought Rembrandt's *Mill,* paid a cool half million for it, just as he paid a half million for a Vandyke from the Cattaneo collection. And Huntington paid four hundred thousand dollars for Velas-

quez's *Duke of Olivares,* and Frick paid the same amount for a Gainsborough portrait, and a quarter of a million for a small Rembrandt. And I could go on that way until you got tired listening to me. But that's not the important thing. All you've got to do is look at it. You'd know——"

He broke off with a sense of inadequacy. Then wakening to the extent to which he had overlooked her in his excitement, he linked his arm fraternally through hers as she stood studying the canvas.

"Yes, it's lovely," she murmured, without responding to the pressure on her arm. She seemed suddenly small and fragile there under the shadow of his shoulder.

"There's only one thing in all the world lovelier," he told her as he smiled down into her face, grown pitiful with its shadows of fatigue.

"One thing lovelier?" she echoed absently, clinging to him with a touch of forlornness. That morning of tangled emotions had plainly been a little too much for her.

"I mean you," he said.

She raised ardent eyes at that, flushing happily as she looked up into his troubled face. For his thoughts, even as he spoke, had gone pioneering off into the uncertain future. And he turned her jealously away from the glow of the canvas.

"It mustn't take you away from me," he cried out, with a parade of self-pity.

She smiled surrenderingly, at that, and still again looked up into his eyes with a gaze so shot through with incongruously mingled hunger and gratitude that he turned sharply and took her in his arms.

She lay there passively, with her eyes half closed again. And he studied her, satisfied with the silence and her nearness.

He was still studying her when the sharp clangor of a bell sounded from below stairs. She drew away from him with a stricken light in her eyes.

The bell sounded again, more authoritatively, more angrily.

"That's Aunt Georgina," she said, with a look of childishness creeping back into her face. "She keeps that bell beside her bed. It means she wants me."

He arrested her retreat, resenting the meekness which that summons had imposed upon her.

"But what are we to do about this?" he demanded, with a gesture toward the Titian.

"What is best to do?" she asked in a whisper.

It took some time before he seemed able to answer that question.

"First thing, I want to wire for Banning. He's the head of our house. This thing's too big for me to handle alone. I've got to get Banning here as soon as wheels can bring him. Then—oh, confound that bell! It sounds like something out of Dante!"

"I must go!" she told him.

He was tempted to smile for a moment at what seemed like terror on her face. But there were certain things he had not forgotten.

"And what will you do with me?" he asked, holding her back by one white hand.

"You'll have to go down by the back stairway," she whispered.

"But I'm not going for long," he stoutly asserted as he held her face up to the light. "From to-day," he said, as he stooped and kissed her impassive lips, "the new era begins, and you'll see me back to-morrow —with trumpets blowing."

CHAPTER EIGHT

It was not with trumpets blowing, and it was not the next morning, that Conkling returned to the tumble-down old manor-house overlooking Lake Erie.

It was before sundown of the same day that he returned. And he went back without the reasons for doing so being altogether clear to his own mind. It was a movement born of subliminal propulsions as vague yet as compelling as those of a young mother creeping through midnight darkness to the disturbingly silent crib of the new life she had brought into being.

Conkling had thought, at first, to have Banning join him, for now that the movement had taken on dimensions so bewildering he felt the need not so much of pilotage from the older man as of partnership in the knowledge of a fact which had the power of leaving him a bit dizzy.

Yet his efforts to connect with Banning over the long-distance telephone had not met with success, and the mere despatch of a telegram, worded as judicially as he could contrive it, brought no sense of response and no companionable easing off of his own excitement.

It was noon before that initial high tension fried itself in its own juices. With the lengthening day Conkling grew, if not calmer, at least more coherent, and afterthought paced sedulously at his elbow. He began to see difficulties and dangers. The disturbing thought of even a second Alcazar crept into his mind, for such a thing as insurance, of course, had never entered the heads of those two old incompetents of the manor-house. Then his attention swung away from the Titian and centered more and more on Julia Keswick. He had no liking for the situation in which she had been left, short-lived as it was bound to prove. She was as wonderful, in a way, as the Titian itself. In many ways she was much more wonderful. She had been tragically held in, repressed,

walled up with her own self-communing young soul. But the potentialities were there, and he was to throw open the gates of life for her. He had already seen knowledge come to that intent and eager young face. The memory of it, in fact, still had the power to quicken his pulse. That had never happened to him before. It was something which he could not analyze, which he had no wish to analyze. Instinct, he felt, had already shown itself infallible. Besides being infallible, it was also incontestable. It had swept him, helpless, into a feverish and unexpected happiness. And that happiness, he told himself, was only the beginning.

But now that the die had been cast, he had his obligations to the woman he loved. Yet he had passively left her in a situation which was anything but savory. She was a woman, in a way, but that house of hate, that atmosphere of fundamental intolerances, cramped her back into something akin to childhood. The memory of that raucous call bell began to grate on him. Equally distasteful to him grew the

thought of her being confronted by two inquisitorial old tyrants who had stumbled across the new secret of her life. Their power to harm her was already gone. He would see to that promptly enough. But their power to make that day one of unhappiness for her remained still with them. He asked himself if she could possibly need him. And once that question had been put, his disquieted soul wondered if through the clairvoyance of passion she was not striving to reach him at that very moment, if she was not calling to him through the hot and lonely afternoon.

He put a sudden end to those questionings and his own mounting unrest. He did so by climbing into his car and starting out for the Keswick home, and he was racing before he was half-way there as though some etheric summons kept reminding him that he must make up for lost time.

When he arrived there he found the gate nailed up. This disturbed him, but it did not deter him. He promptly removed a moldering picket from the fence which ran beside the overgrown cedar hedge, crept

through the opening and pushed his way on through the tangle of dry shrubbery. He heard the inhospitable scream of the peacock as he crossed the parched lawn, and the bawling of a neglected calf in one of the outbuildings beyond the grim-fronted manor-house. He stared up at that house as he entered the lengthening shadow from its dormer-windowed hip roof, and as he did so he was tempted to laugh down what seemed little more than half-hysteric fears huddling about his heart. It was sheer paganism, he tried to tell himself, this foolish fretting of his own soul with the thought that exceptional happiness such as his promised to be stood in some way involved with exceptional penalties. He even stopped and looked up at the house again, deciphering something reassuring in its unaltered and unaltering face. Then, of a sudden, his heart seemed to stop beating. For drifting out of its open attic window he saw a thinly-coiling column of smoke.

He stood, for a ponderable space of time, frowning vacuously up at it. Then,

as he ran to the broken veranda steps, a thin tumult of voices crept down to him. He heard the repeated high-pitched call of "Unclean! Unclean!" and a voice which reminded him of the frenzied prayer of camp-meeting supplicants cry out, "And forgive, O God, these abominations which have been thrust before thee!"

He did not stop to hear more. He went up the steps two at a time, tried the door, and found it locked. Then without hesitation he ran to one of the French windows, found it fastened and broke away its flimsy catch with one taurine thrust of his shoulder.

He called out as he crossed the shadowy room, knocking over a horsehair chair as he went. But his call remained unanswered. He circled about to the door that opened into the hallway, ran through it and started up the half-lighted stairs with the walnut banister. He was startled by the bright eyes of a cat staring down at him through the gloom. They seemed burning with hate, those luminous and barricading eyes. They even prompted

Conkling, in advancing on them, to crouch low as a man crouches before the spring of a cougar. But they were gone, gone completely, by the time he reached the stairhead.

Even before he arrived at the second and steeper stairway leading to the attic he once more caught the sound of voices from that upper story. They were excited voices, shrill with ecstasy, though one seemed fuller-timbred than the other. It was this voice which he heard intone: "Lust shall not dwell in this house! This abomination has been in our house and has been a curse to us! Cleanse us, O God, of the grossness which has been thrust upon us!" and through this strange incantation the shriller voice piped: "Nor shall we fatten on nakedness and live slothfully on the fruits of sin! And she who has degraded herself before Thine eyes shall be lashed with scorpions and branded with shame!"

And crowding on this came the drunken chanting of the deeper voice: "Therefore will I discover thy skirts upon thy face

that thy shame may appear. I have seen thine adulteries and thy neighings, the lewdness of thy whoredom and thine abominations on the hills in the fields—and thou wilt be made clean!"

Conkling, emerging from the well of the narrow stairway, stood panting and stunned. The air was thick with smoke, and for a moment or two he found it far from easy to see. But he made out two gaunt old women, disheveled and rapt, so intent on their own ends that they neither challenged nor regarded him. He saw the taller one kneeling beside the bone-white sarcophagus which stood toward the center of the attic floor. In this wide basin of marble she had built what first impressed him as a funeral pyre. Heavy coils of smoke were rising from it as she rocked her body back and forth and prayed aloud. But a vaguely familiar smell about that heavy smoke brought Conkling toward her at a bound, for his nostrils, he knew, were sniffing the odors of burning canvas impregnated with oil. But he stopped midway in his flight and ran to the far side of

the room, where he knew the Titian stood. He saw there only the empty frame from which the canvas had been slashed. That took him at a leap back to the sarcophagus.

As he stared down through the thick air he saw a stretch of rimpled canvas belly up with the heat of the flames beneath it. He saw the mellowed and magic ivory gold of a rounded breast swell up and burst in a darkening bubble of heat. He stooped forward with a gasp and caught at one unseared edge of the crumpled-up canvas. Then he just as quickly dropped it and wheeled about. For a repeated hissing sound, followed by a gasp that might have been an echo of his own, fell on his ears.

He saw Lavinia Keswick, with her hair down, with a face like a mænad and with a crop of plaited leather in her hand. Beyond her in the blue-gray air he saw the slender white back of a girl. Her posture impressed him as singularly unnatural, until he suddenly wakened to the fact that she was tied with a cotton rope to the heavy-timbered easel in front of her. Then as he saw the mænad with the flying scant

tresses raise the whip in her hand he realized what was taking place.

He forgot about the crumpled canvas in the narrow marble basin. He ran for the claw that held the whip, caught it and twisted it back. With almost one and the same movement he wrested the rawhide from that shaking claw and sent the bony figure tumbling back over a headless winged lion in marble.

"You muckers! Oh, you muckers!" he cried out, reverting in his excitement to the language of his school-days. Then he turned back to the easel. "Oh, God! Oh, God!" he kept mumbling as he tugged at the knotted cotton rope, for he could see two stripes of red across the whiteness of the stooping slender back.

The girl's face, when he had set her free, was as white as the shoulders from which the clothing had been stripped. She said nothing. She did not even raise her eyes to his. But she drew back as he essayed a futile effort to lift her fallen waist up about her naked shoulders. His hands were shaking and the thick air stung his throat.

He turned about, dazed, as he heard the renewed shrill duet of voices in prayer. The two frenzied old women were on their knees side by side in front of the smoking sarcophagus. They were on their knees, swaying back and forth and calling on God to cleanse their house of its lewdness. In the sarcophagus lay nothing but a layer of smoldering ashes, subsiding slowly, like melting snow. And Conkling, who knew by this time entirely what it meant, felt a blind wave of hate untouched by pity well through his body.

"You fools!" he gasped. "You hopeless fools!"

He was even sobbing a little with the nauseous reaction of it all, and he tried to smother his shame by a parade of ferocity as he turned back to the white-faced girl.

"They've made their nest, the muckers, and now they can lie in it!" he cried, as the girl shrank away a little to stare at the intoning pair still on their knees. She, he remembered as he in turn stared at the youthful face with the prematurely tragic look in its eyes, was all that he could get

out of it now. But it was enough, God knew! And the time for claiming his own was at hand.

"You must come with me," he said as he reached for her. He felt the weight of her body on his arm, weak and relaxed, as he groped his way toward the stairhead.

He thought for a moment that she had fainted. But she said very quietly, "This way," as he made a wrong turn in the gloom of the lower hallway.

THE END

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